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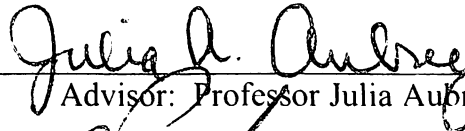
AN ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND MUSICAL  
ADAPTATION IN VOCAL COMPOSITIONS OF KURT WEILL


by  
Elizabeth Rose Williamson


A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 2011

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the compositional transitions in the musical career of Kurt Weill as seen in his German, French, and American works. Weill was a German-born composer who was forced to immigrate to France in the 1920's. He then immigrated to America where he composed for both stage and screen. Specific vocal works by the composer in each country were studied. Research was conducted through the analysis of sheet music, recordings, and a vocal performance of the specific pieces studied. Recordings provided the important aspect of understanding the appropriate vocal style for the music as preferred by the composer. The vocal performance served as the most crucial aspect of the research as performing is the ultimate purpose of Weill's compositions. The results revealed that there was considerable change that occurred in Weill's compositional style as he adapted his music to new cultures. The majority of current research concerning the works of the composer focuses on the history of his life and musical analysis of his compositions without including the perspective of a performer. This thesis attempts to fill that gap through the research of vocal works and insight from a performer's point of view. Because performance is the ultimate goal for Weill's compositions, this study targets performers and interpreters of Weill's vocal works.

## Preface

“I have never acknowledged the difference between serious music and light music. There is only good music and bad music.”

– Kurt Weill

Kurt Weill’s compositional career is often divided into two distinct sections, his European and his American music. Musicologists and music lovers alike tend to gravitate towards one side, staking a preference by declaring the other half of Weill’s compositional life to be less important to the development of his musical career and in the history of music. Those who favor his European music claim that his classically influenced beginnings hold more substance than the frivolous musical theatre he embraced later declaring that the latter was the product of his desire to make money rather than create art. Those backing his American compositions claim that he did not fully mature into his signature style until he left the oppressive surroundings of Germany during the wave of National Socialism. It is my opinion, however, that Weill’s music cannot be split in two definitive sections. Rather than turn a blind eye on half his career, it is important to understand his output as a whole, morphed slowly over time by the pressures of surviving artistically and financially in new musical territories. The social and political changes that occurred in the first half of the twentieth-century had continual effects on Kurt Weill’s compositional style, and he adapted to each new culture by

including aspects of these places through the use of popular music techniques in his compositions.

In order to pinpoint the specific moments of change in Weill's compositional career, I have chosen eleven musical examples that are characteristic of the political and social transformations in history, the influences of his personal life, the physical locations of his travels, and the musical genres with which he experimented. As a vocalist, I have focused the analysis on Weill's vocal music. The composer focused on his staged works, thus my analysis is comprised primarily of excerpts from these shows. I have, however, included a cabaret piece and an art song to further stress the diversity of his compositional style. Through the analyses of these specific works, I intend to show the dramatic alterations in Weill's compositional career as a whole due to the social and political influences in Germany, France, and America.

I identify with Weill's interest in music beyond that of theoretical experiments that only concern the musical elite: his work with *Gebrauchsmusik* – music with a purpose – not to simply accompany staged works, but as an independent voice. Music should never be background entertainment, but an art with a specific meaning, something that envelops the listener and keeps their attention. It is because of this shared philosophy, my interest in music during the Nazi era, and my passion for musical theatre that I have chosen to study the music of this composer. Weill's music enlivens a broad world of imagery and realism, initially blatant in his works in Weimar Germany and then more subdued after his journey to America, but it was still a strong influence in his compositions throughout his career.



An artistic movement known as *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, heavily influenced German music during the Weimar Republic. It was a painter rather than a musician, however, that first coined the term *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub's 1927 Mannheim exhibition consisted of a series of paintings that sought to free art from the heavy expressionism that had overtaken the world of art before and during World War I. The crippling outcome of the war for Germany resulted in a cry against such art, something that had grown to be neither a relatable nor relevant form of expression in the midst of the Weimar Republic. In his invitation to his exhibition, Hartlaub explained his thoughts on the new form by saying:

"I am interested in bringing together representative works by those artists who over the last ten years have been neither impressionistically vague nor expressionistically abstract, neither sensuously superficial nor constructivistically introverted. I want to show those artists who have remained -- or who have once more become -- avowedly faithful to positive, tangible reality." (Kowalke, 61)

Although no one person is responsible for the musical changeover of this idea, Heinrich Bessler wrote in 1927 that he saw nothing to stand in the way of *Neue Sachlichkeit* carrying over to other art forms, especially music (Kowalke, 62). The concept was universal to all art, but it found a home in musical composition and performance. In fact, this sentiment in music had been growing alongside visual art. Composers gravitated toward the idea of *Gebrauchsmusik*, music that is utilized, rather than the "art for art's sake." Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill are the two composers most readily associated with *Gebrauchsmusik*, but Weill, unlike Hindemith, did not denounce

the style after its formal death at the fall of the Weimar Republic in 1933. Instead, he carried the philosophy of music with a purpose into all of his works thereafter. Weill categorized his later works of the Weimar Republic that exemplified this new idea, and he even defined *Gebrauchsmusik* in his own terms in a 1929 newspaper article:

“We have lowered our aesthetic sights. We have realized that our artistic production must again be given its natural breeding ground: that music in its significance as the simplest human need can also be presented with heightened means of expression; that the boundaries between ‘art music’ and ‘use music’ must be brought closer together and gradually erased and transcended.” (Kowalke, 72)

Weill used the terms *Verbrauchsmusik* (music to use up, to consume) and *Gebrauchsmusik* (music to be made use of, to utilize) to illustrate his philosophy of art. The purpose objectively and realistically depicts the social and political life in Weimar Germany through music with a specific purpose. Weill translated this into his own compositions by using genres common to popular culture in Germany, such as the influence of American jazz and Berlin nightclub cabaret. This attraction of using popular music in his compositions traveled with him to Paris, New York, and even in the film industry of Hollywood.

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## **Kurt Weill: An Introduction**

Kurt Julian Weill was born on March 2, 1900 to well-educated and cultured Jewish parents, Albert Weill and Emma Ackermann in the small town of Dessau, Germany. The Weill family lineage can be traced back to the fourteenth-century as a long line of religious intellectuals, most especially rabbis (Farneth, 4). Albert Weill maintained the long tradition by holding the position of chief cantor in the Dessau synagogue. Along with leading the music within the synagogue, he also composed a number of sacred motets and liturgical works. This interest in musical composition led him to emphasize musical education to all four of his children from an early age, much of which was done from within the synagogue. The cantor also took his children on regular outings to the opera.

Kurt, the third of the four children, showed early signs of significant interest and talent in composition. Knowing the difficulty of having a financially stable career in music, his father attempted to persuade Kurt to study medicine as well. It was his two older brothers rather than Kurt himself who opposed this idea. Nathan and Hans promised their father that they would become a doctor and a businessman, respectively, so that they could help support the young aspiring musician (Farneth, 8). In 1915, Albert Weill sought the tutelage of Albert Bing, the first Kapellmeister of the Dessau Opera, for the continuance of his son's musical education. Bing, a former student of Hans Pfitzner,

instructed Kurt personally with a primary focus on piano and theory. Bing and his wife became such an integral part of the young composer's life that he looked upon them as second parents, spending almost as much time at their residence as in his own home (Farneth, 12).

When Weill was 18 years old, Bing noted that his student would need further instruction and suggested that he enroll at the Berlin Musikhochschule. Here he would study composition under opera composer Engelbert Humperdinck, learning various musical styles from classicism to modernism. Weill found the tutelage too restricting, however, and soon planned to leave Berlin for Dessau. Before his departure he witnessed the effects of the effects of the 1918 November Revolution that would lead up to the establishment of the new governmental system of the Weimar Republic. Although the revolt began as a military uprising, the sentiment resonated with the German citizens as well, including Weill. Germany became a parliamentary democracy that granted all citizens, including women, the right to vote. Despite what seemed to be a well-formed governmental system, German extremists from both ends of the political spectrum were skeptical of the republic and ignored its authority, making the republic almost powerless. Because of the great opposition the Weimar Republic administration faced, Germany saw massive political violence resulting from the refusal of citizens to accept its legitimacy as a government. Artists thrived in the unstable society, using their art as a creative outlet to depict the tense surroundings (Weitz, 253). Weill, like many of these fellow artists, sought new techniques and styles to effectually compose music that would be relevant and moving. The effects of the establishment of the Weimar Republic in Berlin heavily affected the composer and played a monumental role in his German compositions.

Once back in his hometown, he worked to support himself and strengthen his musical skills at the Dessau Hoftheater as the opera coach, and he conducted a small opera company in Lüdenschaid, a small town about 300 miles west of Dessau. These jobs were only a temporary situation for the composer, as he knew he required more musical education. He sought a spot in the prestigious masterclass in Vienna under the direction of Arnold Schoenberg, the famed leader of the Second Viennese School and the father of the twelve-tone technique in atonal music. Such a professor would be extremely expensive, and despite his wishes Weill was forced to search for another option.

Weill returned to Berlin in 1919 after being invited to study composition with Ferruccio Busoni at the Preußische Akademie der Künste. The Italian composer almost exclusively wrote for the piano, incorporating a liberal use of masterful contrapuntal concepts. Busoni recognized both Weill's talent and his flaws, especially concerning the errors in his use of counterpoint, but the young composer progressed easily in his studies under his new teacher (Farneth, 17). He was a diligent student and gave theory lessons and directed local synagogue choirs in order to support his studies. During his time with Busoni, Weill's primary compositional output was limited to instrumental works, songs, and his first attempts at opera. His compositional style at this point leaned towards the post-Romantic style, reflecting his teacher's views. In 1922, Weill composed *Zaubernacht*, a ballet-pantomime that brought him his first real taste of success. The same year led to four other well-received performances of Weill's compositions, bringing him into the spotlight of German musical intellectuals. He was initiated into the Novembergruppe, an organization of artists interested in progressive creativity (Wager).

Being a part of this group opened doors for Weill, as he was able to meet new people who could help expand his artistic sphere.

The year 1924 was pivotal for the young composer. In January, Weill was introduced to Georg Kaiser, his first collaborator. Through his membership to the Novembergruppe, Weill was recommended to the playwright. Kaiser was an eminent German playwright in the early twentieth-century, known for his impressionistic works that detailed political and social characteristics of Germany at the time. In order to work more closely with the composer, Kaiser invited Weill to his home. In order to reach the playwright's home, Weill would have to be rowed across a lake. Kaiser sent Lotte Lenya, a woman working for him as an au pair for his children, to transport Weill to the house. Lenya and Weill were immediately entranced with one another, and their lifelong love and friendship was ignited (Hirsch, 20).

Weill worked with Kaiser on an adaptation of the latter's play, *Der Protagonist*, while continuing to court Lenya. Kaiser oversaw the couple in a fatherly way, even allowing them the use of his Berlin apartment. Because of his earlier successes and the promising work on *Der Protagonist*, Busoni recommended Weill to Universal Edition in Vienna, a publishing house, and Weill was granted a ten-year publishing contract (Robinson). *Der Protagonist* is set in Shakespearean London where a troupe of actors prepare for an upcoming performance of their comedy, but are informed at the last minute that the Duke is to attend and that he demands a tragedy. To suit the Duke, the Protagonist (the leader of the troupe) decides to keep the scenario but change a few details to secure a tragedy. Meanwhile, the Protagonist's sister has found a lover and fearfully tells the Protagonist her news, knowing that he has an incestuous love towards



her. Because he refuses to believe her, she runs away to get proof of her love. Upon her arrival, the Protagonist is in such a state of anger that he is unable to separate reality from illusion. Unaware that he is acting in a play, the sister responds to his anger as it is real, and he stabs his sister to death. As the authorities come to take him away, he asks to be allowed to finish his production in his “best part.” (Drew, 158) Weill brought the disturbing plot to life with his use of borderline atonal melodic lines and dysfunctional harmonic progressions, similar to musical movement of the Second Viennese School of Music.

Weill completed *Der Protagonist* in 1925 and began working on other compositions such as the concertino *Der neue Orpheus* set to the text of Iwan Goll. Weill recognized this work as a turning point in his music toward a “new, simpler style” of composition (Farneth, xiii). While waiting to premiere his work, he began working on another one-act opera known under an English title as *Royal Palace*. Set in a lavish Italian hotel, the plot focuses on a married woman, Dejanira, and her difficulty in deciding between the three men in her life. These men are Yesterday’s Lover, her Husband, and Tomorrow’s Admirer. Unable to choose, she decides to throw herself into the lake, but is morphed miraculously into a mermaid-like creature (Drew, 162). The psychological plot allowed Weill to experiment further with his Busonian techniques and to serve as a vehicle for his experimentation with the fusion of opera and ballet. His orchestrations were not nearly as thick and lush as they had been in his works previous to *Der neue Orpheus*; Weill had been interested in a gradual shift from extreme complexity to simpler, more straightforward musical composition, such as he had done for *Der Protagonist*.

As he reexamined the established rules of composition with creative enthusiasm, the composer found happiness in his romantic life as well as his musical life. Weill and Lenya decided to marry after six months of living together. The civil ceremony took place in Berlin in 1926, yet it was the preparations for the opening performance of *Der Protagonist* that dominated the lives of the newlyweds. The triumph of this show signified Weill's first major success on the German stage (Farneth, 42). The glow of success surrounding it carried over into the following year. Such a masterful work even prompted critics to call for a companion piece, this time a comedy, to complement the Kaiser-Weill creation (Taylor, 96). The innovators were only too happy to oblige, and they quickly began another project in March 1927.

On February 18, 1928 Kaiser and Weill premiered *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren* (The Tsar has his photograph taken) in Leipzig. The one-act show takes place in the 1914 Parisian photography studio of renowned photographer Angèle. Upon discovering that she is to photograph the Tsar, Angèle excitedly prepares her studio. Three revolutionaries break into the room and take the photographer and her assistants away, knowing that it is their chance to assassinate the Tsar. One of the revolutionaries dresses herself as Angèle, while the other two accomplices act as her assistants. After replacing the camera under the black cloth with a loaded gun, the murderous team receives their expected guest along with his bodyguards. The Tsar is unlike anything False Angèle has imagined; he is a kind, peaceful man who is just as unhappy with his imperial role as the revolutionaries. Upon meeting the imposter, he instantly falls in love with her. He excuses his men so that they might be alone, and even demands that he photograph her instead. This results in a comic battle of who will take whose picture.

The three revolutionaries are alerted to the fact that the police are on their way to apprehend them, and they manage to quickly escape. The gun is removed from the camera, and the Tsar, still in love with False Angèle, sadly consents to have his photo taken by the real Angèle (Drew, 169).

Despite that it was to accompany *Der Protagonist*, Weill's work on *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren* greatly dwarfs its predecessor in both musical and theatrical innovations. Throughout the show, a chorus comments musically on the action of the plot, most notably in the finale with their incessant and unnecessary repetition of "The Tsar is having his picture taken!" as the character is doing just that. Weill's use of a Greek chorus serves as a humble bow to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, a work and composer he greatly admired. Increasing the weight of the show's political statement, Weill placed his chorus in the orchestra pit and costumed them in identical hats, false beards, and sleek black coats. This use of typification, a theatrical technique used by expressionist playwrights (Kowalke, 92), unified the chorus into one social character. Another added component of the show was the use of prerecorded music. As False Angèle is attempting to dissuade the love-struck Tsar, the "Tango Angèle" is played on a gramophone onstage. It not only served as an introduction to Weill's use of media in his work, but also his interest in incorporating popular music genres, specifically jazz.

Each of these devices (the Greek chorus, typification, and use of media) classifies *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren* as an epic opera, a style of musical performance that exemplifies a disassociation between the audience and the action on stage (Taylor, 99). Weill's highly innovative opera grew further and further away from *Der Protagonist*, an opera now almost conventional in comparison. In fact, his 1928 opera was often paired

with Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* instead and was done so with Weill's blessing. *Der Protagonist* may have served as the composer's first staged work, but the exploration of epic opera in *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* foreshadowed a compositional voice he would soon hold as his own. The stage was now perfectly set for the beginning of the most famous German theatrical partnership with the entrance of Bertolt Brecht.

## CHAPTER I

### “Alabama Song” from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

In March of 1927, Kurt Weill heard a radio performance of *Mann ist Mann*, a stage play written concerning German society during the Weimar Republic and what he regarded to be society’s casual disposal of man, especially within the military. To accompany the matter-of-fact attitude that permeated the performance, a series of incidental music pieces were included to support the movement of the plot. Singing the theme song was the writer of the entire work, cantankerous and notorious Bertolt Brecht. This was not Weill’s introduction to Brecht’s works; in fact the former had been powerfully moved by the latter’s *Hauspostille*, a collection of poetry written much in the same vein as *Mann ist Mann*. Brecht took advantage of his knowledge of the Bible (something for which he could thank his devout Protestant mother) and expertly wrote the poems in *Hauspostille* (“domestic breviary”) in the style of hymns, psalms, prayers, and sermons. It was the play *Mann ist Mann*, however, that brought these two minds together. As an artistic critic for *Die Deutsche Rundfunk*, Weill wrote that this play was “perhaps the most novel and powerful theatrical work of our time” (Hirsch, 27). Such a positive review did not escape the indestructible ego of Brecht and he therefore decided to meet Weill.

Bertolt Brecht's interest in theatre can be traced to his youth when he wrote plays for school productions and his school newspaper. He did not, however, study theatre or literature, but medicine at the university in Munich. At the outbreak of the World War I, he witnessed his friends and colleagues taken to war. He attempted to avoid being drafted himself by enrolling in an additional course of study, but he was soon forced to participate in the war effort and was stationed at a military medical clinic in Augsburg (Fucgi, 44). It was the grotesque visions of war that prompted him to express his emotions through writing. Like Weill, Brecht was immensely dissatisfied with the outcome of the war and the strong changes that took place in Germany. He grew increasingly antibourgeois, and this attitude was reflected in his plays. After using dada and expressionistic techniques in his works, he went on to develop his own style of writing. In the early 1920s, he was introduced to the philosophies of Marxism, developed strong Marxist beliefs, and anchored most of his works in his "savage pacifism" (Taylor, 101).

Brecht pioneered and mastered the art of what he called "epic theatre," a genre that not only allowed him to voice his newly founded Marxist views in a theatrical setting but also created an opportunity to express a social commentary. In the vein of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Brecht aimed to put current political and social matters in a new light of stark realism. The playwright wanted to break the fourth wall of theatre, forcing the audience to view his works as essays on German society rather than dramatic stories. This was accomplished through several techniques, including the use of outside media in his productions (such as film projections and titles of each scene displayed on placards). The scripts would often require actors to break character and talk directly to the audience,

a blatant disregard for the fourth wall. By including aspects like asides to the audience, complete breaks in the action to explain the plot, and use of outside media, Brecht was able to successfully alter the way his audience members viewed theatre and their society. This new form of theatre also affected his views of performance practice. He directed his actors to perform directly to the audience rather than in a particular character. The audience was to think about its experience instead of empathizing with the characters (Drain, 111). To keep spectators from such empathy, Brecht created the idea of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or the Alienation Effect. A detached and cold presentation of his material removed the effects of tragedies, dramas, and comedies that served as entertainment. In his notes to *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* Brecht outlined his definition of the new theatrical form by comparing it to the previous dramatic theatre, as seen in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Dramatic Theatre versus Epic Theatre**

Source: Drain, Richard. "Chapter 28: Prologue to The Exception and the Rule (1930)." *Twentieth-century Theatre: a Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 1995.

The modern theatre is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre:\*

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
plot	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer, but
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	the spectator stands outside, studies
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of the inquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

\* This table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument.

The addition of music was the last step to enveloping the epic detachment, and Brecht considered it to be of equal importance to his other theatrical elements such as the cinematic projections and placards (Taylor, 122). Weill, of course, felt differently about the level of significance of his compositions.

Despite the fact that he was exceedingly defiant of conventional theatrical standards and seemingly outrageous and unpredictable within the theatrical world, Brecht



stood a calculated man, both in business and personal relationships. These relationships were dictated by formal contracts that Brecht himself furnished. For example, there was a time when he floated between Augsburg and Munich, and he maintained serious intimate relationships with both Bie Banholzer and Marianne Zoff. The two women met and decided to force him to choose between them. When the three of them sat down in a Munich café, the women were disappointed by Brecht's one word reply: "both" (Kowalke, 158).

He began contract negotiations with each woman. He was to marry Zoff because she was once again carrying his child, but as her contract specified, he would divorce her as soon as the child was born and given his name. The contract also maintained that she had to be faithful to him while he could enjoy sexual independence, allowing him to see Banholzer and any other woman he wanted. Banholzer took her contract to a lawyer, who deemed that it "offended all public morality" (Kowalke, 159). He never married Banholzer, but he did divorce Zoff, and he continued to have such contracts with many more women throughout the course of his life. By the time he began working with Weill, Brecht was a master creator of illusive contracts that benefited himself at all times. Weill, on the other hand, had modestly accepted his Universal Edition contract on meager means. It is blatantly obvious that Brecht had an advantage over Weill, in this manner and the composer was exploited to the point of a financial frustration that carried over to Lotte Lenya after Weill's death (Kowalke, 162).

Weill met Brecht as a controversial rising star of the Berliner theatre, a man who quickly, if not abruptly, gained notoriety due to the uproars caused by his works. He had secured a respectable income (in part thanks to his persuasive charm and knowledge of

contracts) and enjoyed his freedom to be the bad boy of the arts. Weill, on the other hand, earned a modest living through his critically acclaimed, but wholly unknown works of atonally complex music. Brecht thought little of him, and, in all probability the playwright was only interested in meeting with Weill to hear more raving reviews about his *Mann ist Mann*.

The two men had more in common than either of them had suspected. Weill expressed eager interest in Brecht's *Hauspostille*, specifically his poems about Mahagonny, a utopia society set in America. They both shared a curious magnetism to American life and culture, an interest common to many German artists. Weill grabbed the deviant author's attention when he set the five Mahagonny poems to music, and the two men began working together.

By the time he met Brecht, Weill had abandoned the Busonian psychological musical style that had awarded him the occasional nod from the musical elite of Berlin. He had matured into his own method of composition, maintaining the integrity of the harmonic approach similar to his much-admired idol Stravinsky, while simplifying the melodies and forms. The mixture of these two styles was the beginning of his attempt to blur the thickly definitive line between opera and musical theater, orchestra and band, concert and cabaret. It was as if Weill had translated the foreign world of atonal music into the vernacular of popular compositions.

Between the two of them, Brecht and Weill invented the "song". This term had nothing to do with its English homonym. In fact, Eric Bentley, a friend of Brecht's, humorously recommended that in order to properly understand the meaning of their new form, English speakers should instead use the word "zonk" (Taylor, 107). In any case, a

“song” was the vague technical term applied to a sung musical work that could include popular, jazz, and/or cabaret forms. In fewer words, a ‘song’ was neither a Lied nor an art song. The critic Herbert Fleischer praised the new form, exclaiming that it was distinctly the mature compositional voice that Weill had been seeking. In his own definition of the phenomena, he said:

A Weill song is not a common-or-garden hit tune but a ballad. Someone from the lower classes, someone of the streets, sings his or her little bit of life, or little bit of romance, of love, of longing for adventure. The songs are in essence one continuous lamentation, one continuous attack...they are language, philosophy, life in musical sound. (Taylor, 108)

Shortly before meeting Brecht, Weill had been invited to write a one-act opera for the prestigious Baden-Baden Music Festival in the summer of 1927. The festival originated in 1921 by Prince Max Egon zu Donaueschingen’s desire to endorse young composers specializing in modern music, allowing them to present their ideas in a relaxed and comfortable setting (Taylor, 99-100). Weill was pleased to have earned such an invitation and was excited to have a chance to prove his worth. He had originally planned to play it safe by creating a comic scenic cantata based on a well known and favorite story, such as *King Lear* or *Antigone*, but when Brecht’s Mahagonny pieces came along, he abandoned his previous notion altogether.

Weill and Brecht had grand aims concerning the Mahagonny poetry, specifically forming it into a full-scale ‘opera’ (as much as any artifact by these two men could be called an opera). The Baden-Baden Festival, however, required something smaller and less demanding, and thus, after the concept was realized and early stages of the opera composition had already begun, they decided to simplify it for the occasion as a Songspiel (a bastard version of a Singspiel). It consisted of the five songs based on

Brecht's original poems, each followed by an orchestral interlude. Because it was only the basic essence of what Weill and Brecht had planned, it lacked many key elements of performance productions, such as characterization, dialogue separate from the text of the poetry, and little action other than what was suggested through the text. Brecht's poetry linked together for this particular production created a concentrated and potent plot. For as simple as the actual action was, the subtext was filled with complex connotations of the desires of society. People are attracted to the city of Mahagonny because it promises to be a place without rules and restrictions, but they grow disappointed after they arrive there because it is expensive. An interjection from God suddenly occurs, damning the inhabitants to hell. The citizens rebel, however, claiming that they are already in hell (Drew, 171).

The discussion of the singing style to be used for this production was easily settled. The perfect addition to their antithesis of opera was to have legitimate operatic voices perform. This idea changed though, when one of the female opera singers had to cancel. Weill thought of his wife, Lotte Lenya, as a replacement although she could not read music nor did she have a strong voice. Yet what she lacked in vocal skills and technique she made up for in charisma and acting talent. Utilizing Lenya not only pleased Weill, but also legitimately added to the Brechtian theory of division between performances for the elite and performances for the common people with the quality of her voice. Lenya had no formal vocal training, and few would call her voice beautiful. The raspy, gritty reality of it, however, attracted her to the common people rather than the elite bourgeois.

On the night of the performance, the invited crowd of aristocrats and international music leaders gathered to find an oversized boxing ring where a stage should have been. The performance began with a gunshot, shocking the audience that had prepared for a relaxed evening of concert music. Throughout the sixty minutes of the show, Brecht walked in and out of the boxing ring while smoking a cigar, as a means to disrupt any attempt on the part of the audience to empathize with characters on stage (Taylor, 114). Weill and Brecht succeeded in erasing the fourth wall, bringing the audience into the action. As the action came to a close, the crowd erupted in boos and shouts of bravo alike. The roar of the crowd was more than expected. Because Brecht anticipated that the crowd would whistle at the actors, he supplied the actors with their own little whistles so that they could make noise of their own (Taylor 115). While there were many who could not wrap their minds around the new music and theatre, there were also those begging for more.

Despite the fact that it was a tremendous success in the eyes of the composer and playwright, Weill and Brecht did not continue to work on the show as they had originally planned. In fact, it was not until two years later that they began scoring it for a full-length opera. The plot for the new opera needed to be more profound in order to provide enough material for a substantial work in three acts, yet the basic plot structure did not change.

The opera begins with three fugitives, Begbick and her accomplices Fatty and Moses, on the run from the law. They decide to create their own city in the desert so that they might be free, but also of course to make some money. Mahagonny is advertised as a paradise where there are no rules, and whiskey and women are everywhere. Such an

advertisement quickly floods the desert with unhappy people from all over the world, but they soon realize the truth about the place and abandon it. Among the few who remain, Jim Mahoney, a lumberjack, senses the troubles of the city that the others had seen. Begbick has been running the place with fierce legislation and hand-written rules. A hurricane soon approaches the city, and Jim takes advantage of the danger to call for the end of Begbick's oppressive rule. The hurricane, though it had been set to hit Mahagonny with brutal force, misses the city completely, and the citizens rejoice over Jim's proclamation. Begbick, however, angrily finds him, takes him to trial, and executes him. God comes into the scene and banishes them all to hell, but they claimed to already be there. The citizens of the city are fearful and angry that the city could kill one of their own, and they burn it to the ground in protest, revolting against God (Drew, 177).

The "Alabama Song," one of the original five songs, is performed in the first act in front of a half curtain, seemingly as a semi-scene. Jenny the prostitute has come with her fellow working girls to seek out the paradise city. They long for whiskey, money, and men. The song itself is ingeniously composed into two sections, verse and refrain, the first of which is a mockingly simple three-note melody sung by Jenny followed by another three-note melody sung by her companions, all of which is supported by an obstinate accompaniment comprised of pulsing eighth notes, as can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Verse of “Alabama Song”**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny: Oper in drei Akten*. Vienna: Universal-Edition, 1929.

The image displays a musical score for the verse of "Alabama Song" by Kurt Weill. The score is written in 3/4 time and is marked "Moderato". It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano accompaniment is characterized by a steady, rhythmic pattern of chords. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, maintaining the same rhythmic and harmonic structure. The score is presented in a clear, black-and-white format, typical of a printed musical score.

Before coming to the refrain, the music almost stops altogether, enhancing the alienation technique that was rampant throughout the show. The refrain itself is set up by another slightly different orchestral ostinato, and the voice reenters, this time with a completely new sound. Jenny sings almost in a ballad style, and Weill's stretching, legato line allows the character to melodiously sing a lamentation for leaving the moon of Alabama (refer to Figure 3). Brecht set Mahagonny in America because of his fascination with the country, but the use of the state of Alabama purely came as a choice of exotic sounding places.

**Figure 3: Refrain of “Alabama Song”**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny: Oper in drei Akten*. Vienna: Universal-Edition, 1929.

Weill had found his sweet spot for composing in Brechtian formats. By mixing the alienation affects with challengingly beautiful harmonies, he had created a new form of popular music. The listener might hear and enjoy the music purely for its musical quality, but then would laugh because they would realize the deeper meaning behind it (Hirsch, 71). The music had become driving force, imposing the text to bend to its will. It was natural that it would be *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* that would cause a rift in the partnership between Brecht and Weill.

Brecht, ever so anxious to make all subordinate to his will, immediately saw that his poetry was no longer at the forefront of the opera. He became stubborn and inflexible, running rehearsals with a strict hand, forcing the director to succumb to his choices. The argument over text versus music became so heated that the two men became irrational. Brecht would enter a room, notice Weill, and abruptly leave. Weill



complained, "I didn't start it...Brecht's getting everything his way...He always does" (Hirsch, 90).

Unfortunately for the show, it was faced with problems from the very beginning. Brecht and Weill were unable to secure a prime venue at Kroll because the show was viewed to be too risky. Several theatres refused to present it for the same reason, but they were finally allowed to perform it in Leipzig, under the condition that some of the more grotesque and risqué scenes were either to be cut or rewritten. Willing to do anything at this point for a venue, Brecht and Weill fervently rewrote.

Brecht's political beliefs that bled into his theatrical works were beginning to cause a stir among the theatre crowd, especially under the increasing influence of National Socialism in German society and culture. Several conductors refused to work with them, fearing association might bring them trouble. On opening night, March 9, 1930, Weill and Lenya had to walk through a thick crowd of protesting brownshirts to get to the theater. Throughout the run of the opera, the show experienced police intrusions, turning on the house lights, more Nazi demonstrations, and continual cuts to the original script in order to satisfy fearful collaborators (Hirsch, 82).

Brecht's political fervency combined with Lenya and Weill's growing dislike of his personality dramatically damaged the working relationship. Brecht at one time called Weill a "phony Strauss" and then threatened to push him down the stairs (Hirsch, 90). The poet's womanizing and loud ego had intensely unnerved the composer. Weill tried to convince his publishers that the work was not political, but his efforts were in vain. The political climate was too thick and everything at this point, especially if written by Brecht, was considered to be political. The production had an outstanding run for an

opera, but was very disappointing in a commercial sense, and therefore was left alone,  
not to be thought of for years.

## CHAPTER II

### “Seeräuberjenny” from *Die Dreigroschenoper*

The genesis of the most popularly famous work created by the Weill-Brecht duo, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, began with Elisabeth Hauptmann. In 1920, London had seen an extremely successful revival of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, a ballad opera written in 1728 that humorously broke down the haughty concepts of opera as a genre as well as satirized social and political issues in eighteenth-century London. As Bertolt Brecht’s assistant, Hauptmann had her eyes open for potential projects, and Gay’s politically charged ballad opera seemed perfect for Brecht. Hauptmann was fluent in the English language and knowledgeable of its literature, allowing her to effectively translate the libretto from English into German. After completing the skeleton of the work, she left it to sit on Brecht’s desk among other scripts, “so that he would do something with it” (Taylor, 30).

Hauptmann’s work lay dormant until Ernst Josef Aufricht walked into Brecht’s office in March 1928. Aufricht had worked as an actor in Berlin, but he quickly realized that his average performing talent alone would not be enough to leave his mark on Berlin’s theatre. With monetary help from his affluent father, Aufricht leased the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm hoping that his role as a producer would fare him better than as an actor (Fuegi, 194). He was attracted to Brecht’s controversial works and sought after the

playwright for a commission. Brecht held only a mild interest in the Gay script, and he proposed a completely different work to Aufrecht. It was not until the producer turned it down that Brecht offered up Hauptmann's work. Aufrecht loved the racy flavor of the story, and, despite the fact that it was merely a rough translation of Gay's text and only six scenes showed signs of Brecht's work, he chose to forge ahead with what the playwright called *Gesindel* ('Rabble') (Taylor, 132). The producer was determined to have the show open for his birthday on August 31, less than six months away, forcing Brecht to work quickly.

Kurt Weill had by this time established a name for himself as a *Neutöner*, a type of composer interested in creating intellectually and artistically 'new sounds' within his music (Hirsch, 33). While Brecht identified with Weill's practice of questioning the rules of performance music (and he more importantly enjoyed how much Weill praised Brecht's own works), Aufrecht was skeptical. Brecht feared that Weill's highbrow style would not reflect the raunchy storyline, and he secretly asked Theo Mackeben, the show's conductor, to look at the German libretto as well as the original music by Johann Christoph Pepusch from *The Beggar's Opera* in case he was correct in his assumption that Weill and his music would not mirror Aufrecht's visions (Taylor, 132). He even required Weill to audition by writing a few songs and performing them for the show's collaborators, which included Aufrecht and his wife, Brecht, Mackeben, and Caspar Neher, the scenic designer. Although Aufrecht's wife recalled him to be a terrible pianist and singer, she noted, "He had something very special" (Hirsch, 33). Aufrecht, agreeing with his wife, consented to use Weill's music as a part of the production.

A ticking clock loomed over Weill and Brecht. Brecht was known to be extremely strong-willed and was notorious for ignoring deadlines. He and Weill decided to get away from all the distractions of Berlin and go to the French Riviera, Weill with Lotte Lenya, and Brecht with Helene Weigel and their four-year-old son Stefan. Unlike many professional relationships in musical history, the men were able to fully collaborate in seclusion as co-creators, delving into the project together as equals. By the time early June approached, Weill presented their material to Aufrecht. On August 31, 1928, despite numerous complications and last minute changes, *Die Dreigroschenoper* opened in Aufrecht's theater in Berlin.

*The Beggar's Opera* had been a major change for the operatic climate of the early eighteenth-century because it had rejected the elitist conventions that restricted opera at the time. By almost exclusively using popular tunes as well as spoken dialogue, the performers were able to portray real people rather than the fantastic characters often utilized in traditional opera. These changes were ideal for Gay's eighteenth-century English audiences, but Brecht realized that he required something grittier and darker to accomplish his goals for *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Weill also discarded almost all of Gay's pastoral music, a style much too lighthearted for the subject matter of Brecht's interpretation. Both writer and composer worked to darken the plot, especially harkening upon Brecht's heavy antibourgeois beliefs. Although they maintained the action within the London setting, the Berlin audience would clearly identify that their plot paralleled life in the Weimar Republic.

Other than maintaining the basic character list and outline of the plot in Gay's text, Brecht and Weill completely reconstructed it to suit their adaptation. Renowned

gangster Macheath pseudo-marries Polly Peachum, the daughter of the Beggar King, or boss of the London beggars, angering Herr Peachum. Although he escapes from the wrath of her father, he is betrayed by an ex-lover, Jenny the whore, and is captured and jailed. Macheath is taken to the gallows where he is miraculously spared through use of the theatrical convention of *deus ex machina* by the Queen of England and even given a title and castle (Brecht). The show ends with the cast begging the audience not to punish wrongdoers too harshly, because “happy endings are seldom the lot of the poor” (Grout, 642).

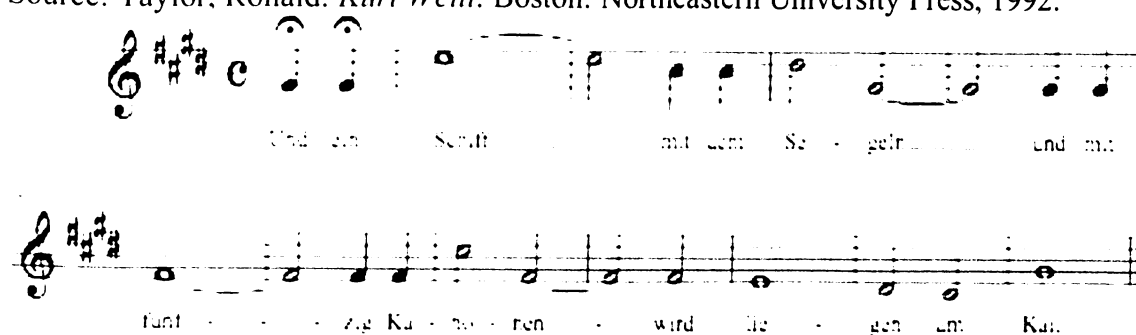
The song “Seeräuberjenny” is actually performed by the character Polly, not by Jenny. When the wedding party consisting of Mac’s thieves does not come up with adequate entertainment for the reception, Polly takes it upon herself to sing. In G. W. Pabst’s 1931 film of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Jenny’s character actually sings this song, probably because Lotte Lenya, who was playing Jenny, premiered the song. Regardless of who exactly sings it, the character is Jenny, sick of waiting on thankless patrons who look down on her. She daydreams that a pirate ship loaded with bloodthirsty pirates will come into the city, take her as their leader, and she will direct them to kill all the citizens towards whom she had grown vengeful.

Several music history sources, including Donald Jay Grout’s *A Short History of Opera*, maintain the widely believed theory that Weill’s score to *Die Dreigroschenoper* is completely original (Grout, 643). Other than borrowing one melody from Pepusch’s original score, Weill set his score by the example of Franz Servatius Brunier, the composer with whom Brecht first collaborated. Brunier had already put melodies for each musical piece of Gay’s text to paper (the example of which can be seen in Figure 4),

but even Brunier's adaptations came from the melodies that Brecht provided, placing the origin of the music with Brecht himself (Taylor, 112). This is not to say, however, that Weill's adaptation was not unique. He merely observed the previous melodic setting as a suggestion and created something new. The music throughout the show is undoubtedly Weill in sound, but the basis is indeed founded in Brecht's melodies. Above all, it is Weill's attention to harmony rather than melody that is exceptional to his compositional style, making the implication that the music does not in any way belong to him and him alone both invalid and completely beside the point. Weill's adaptation can be seen in Figure 5.

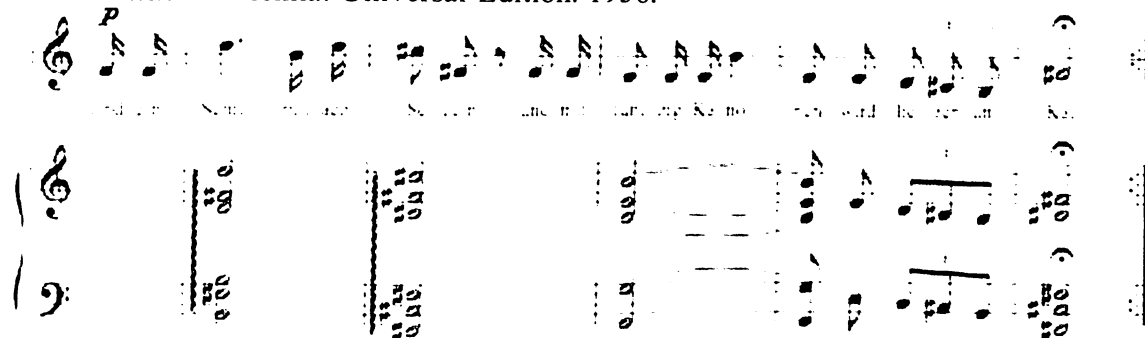
**Figure 4: Example of Brunier's version of "Seeräuberjenny"**

Source: Taylor, Ronald. *Kurt Weill*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992.



**Figure 5: Example of Weill's version of "Seeräuberjenny"**

Weill, Kurt. *Die Dreigroschenoper: Ein Stück mit Musik in einem Vorspiel und acht Bildern*. Vienna: Universal-Edition, 1956.



Weill set Brecht's poetry for this piece in a strophic form including a verse and chorus in each strophe. This form became common among many of Weill's songs throughout his career, allowing the composer to both clearly emphasize the words and to drive the repeating melody into listener's memory. Although the form is very simple, it serves a purpose within the first three verses to show the division between Jenny's reality and her fantasy. The fourth and final verse keeps her in the dream of her victory day with a slow and purposeful march. The form is also a perfect canvas for creating memorable tunes while still placing emphasis on the text, key features of maintaining music that would appeal to the general public.

The verses are intensely wordy and full of harsh German consonants that help to emphasize the anger and vengefulness that Jenny strongly emotes. Weill expertly created a patter melody to support these distinct sounds already polished in the poetry. Not only is he echoing the severity of Jenny's feelings but also the austere world in which she lives. There is a sharp contrast, however, as she thinks upon her ship with eight sails in the refrain. In fact, the music stops completely between the sections, making an obvious statement that a change is about to occur dramatically. Because it is part of her fantasy, the music slows and lengthens casting a dreamy but dark glow over the text, sharply contrasting with the quick motion of the verses.

The final verse-refrain set is much more dramatic than those presented earlier as Jenny stays within her fantasy throughout the entire section until the end of the piece. Weill not only slows the tempo quite dramatically, but he also adds a sense of forcefulness to the accompaniment by maintaining the same musical material as before



but in a slow march style. This reinforces the vocal line and allows the singer to bring out Jenny's calculated intent in a legato line.

Weill's use of spoken dialogue within music is seen in many of his compositions. This technique was a favored way of bringing out the important text and made the character more realistic to the listener. The use of speech within a song was also one of the composer's methods of blurring the seemingly stringent lines of opera, musical theater, and cabaret music. Within "Seeräuberjenny," it appears as if Weill eases into the spoken text just as Jenny eases into her daydream. Once again, it is through the division between the first three verses and the fourth verse that the composer alters his compositional style to follow the text. When Jenny speaks in the first three verses it is only as a restatement of what she had just sung, and it is done only once in each of those verses and in the same phrase each time.

Following the mood of the fourth verse, Weill breaks his previous pattern by actually giving pitches for the same repeated phrase. This continues the melodic vocal line that fluidly outlines Jenny's vision. Singing the phrase also strongly supports the text at this point. By singing the words, "*und sie fragen welchen sollen wir töten,*" ("*and they ask whom we should kill*") twice, Weill suggests that Jenny is romanticizing the deaths of her enemies. The spoken text does not appear until just before the final refrain, adding suspense. In fact, when she does speak, the sudden break in the legato line is shocking. The composer perpetuates this uneasiness by a complete halt in the instrumentation just before it. When asked who she wants to kill, she shouts "*Alle!*" ("*everyone!*"), and continues to describe her pleasure in the gruesome scene, finishing with an apathetic "*hoppla*" (a simple "*hooray*"). By setting all of this as dialogue above a

minimal instrumentation Weill created a specific mood for the character of Jenny, which can be seen in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Spoken text of “Seeräuberjenny”**

Weill, Kurt. *Die Dreigroschenoper: Ein Stück mit Musik in einem Vorspiel und acht Bildern*. Vienna: Universal-Edition. 1956.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Seeräuberjenny". It consists of three staves: a vocal line in treble clef, a piano accompaniment in treble clef, and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Hopp-la! Und das". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords. The score is marked with "pp" (pianissimo) and includes dynamic markings like "v".

“Seeräuberjenny” offers a clearly defined marriage between the styles of Brecht and Weill. The definitive text matched with a strong harmonic musical setting suggests that two men were of one mind as they created the opera. The two men would be separated, however, by their frustrating differences in just a few years. *Die Dreigroschenoper* is one of the best examples of this duo in their prime and their mutual harmony in this work brought them more fame than either had seen before. The success of the show not only boosted the artists’ careers in their separate respective circles, but also began a rise in notoriety for the pair as a theatrical team.

### CHAPTER III

#### “Song der beiden Verkäuferinnen” from *Der Silbersee: Ein Wintermärchen*

The few years following the success of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* were a thorough mix of triumph and disappointment for Weill's compositional career. Weill and Brecht were still on shaky grounds both personally and professionally. One more attempt to work together as collaborators created *Der Jasager*, a school opera in two acts, which was extremely successful throughout Germany. Despite such a victory, Weill had become tired of listening to Brecht's frequent insults, mostly concerning the original authorship of the music for *Mahagonny*, “Alabama Song” in particular.

Matters were to get much worse between the two men after G. W. Pabst premiered his new movie in 1931, *Die Dreigroschenoper*. The company producing the film had made several unauthorized changes within it, thereby breaching contract. Weill, whose claims were legitimate, was upheld in the court decision. Brecht's claims, however, were not, but being the silver-tongued negotiator that he was, he was able to make the company settle with him anyway (Kowalke, 167). The tension caused by the painful lawsuit on top of all their preexisting issues with one another broke the team apart.

Sure that he could retain his popularity without the aid of Brecht's stinging librettos, Weill began working with Caspar Neher on *Die Bürgerschaft*, an opera about a

society falling headfirst towards certain disaster – as Neher had grown up and studied with Brecht, it is not difficult to see the similar taste in dramatic plots. Weill took advantage of the fact that it was Neher's first libretto and that the scenographer was much less oppressive personally than Brecht and composed music for the entire score. He also decided to arrange the lyrics for trained singers, a motion to prove to both his critics and himself that he was more than just a songwriter.

*Die Bürgerschaft* premiered in March 1932, in the face of rising nationalism. The political attention it received attracted the defenders of the Republic, and the opera was used as a main topic for artistic liberty and freedom (Farneth, 89). The show represented Weill's most ambitious work to date, especially considering its length, but the music outshined Neher's text making it a hollow victory for the accomplished composer. Depressing as the show might have been for Weill, he happily received an invitation in December 1932 to promote his work at a Parisian concert funded by Vicomte Charles de Noailles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, incomparable patrons of the arts. He presented a concert under the title "La Sérénade" of his *Jasager* and adapted a slightly longer version of his original *Mahagonny Songspiel*. This was a great success for Weill. While in Paris, he made an attempt to scope out commission possibilities, knowing that the political climate in his home country was growing dangerous.

During this time, Weill's relationship with Lenya was falling apart. Although they had had a relatively open marriage all along, Lenya's attraction to fellow actor Otto Pasetti had grown into a serious relationship. The two had met in April 1932 when they played opposite each other in the Viennese performance of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and she was immediately smitten with the handsome blonde actor. She

began living with him in Vienna, and he convinced her to file for divorce in December of the same year. Weill had a mistress himself; he had been seeing Erika Neher, the wife of homosexual Caspar Neher, but he continued to be passionate towards Lenya. "I'm looking forward to the time when Lenya is old. Then she won't leave me anymore (Taylor, 186)." Weill's separation from Lenya deeply hurt the composer, and his work often suffered from his grief. He had difficulties in trying to produce successful compositions.

After being mildly disappointed with the libretto for *Die Bürgerschaft*, Weill decided to search for a more literary and experienced playwright that led him back to Georg Kaiser. Kaiser had written a three-act musical that interested the composer. The story was a winter tale, set as a fairy tale. Weill had two choices for how to set this libretto: a *Songspiel* like his wildly popular *Die Dreigroschenoper* or a weightier, more operatic musical setting, similar to his earlier works. The latter won out for the same reasons he had chosen to write for trained singers in *Die Bürgerschaft*. His explanation of the work to Universal Edition clearly defined his aims. "It isn't to be an opera, but a work between genres" (Hirsch, 99).

*Der Silbersee* takes place in an unspecified civilization in which there is rampant unemployment, hunger, and poverty. A group of starving teens break into a grocery store, but one boy, Severin, is shot and stopped by the police officer, Olim. When he fills out his report and takes the wounded boy to jail, Olim feels a wave of regret. He fudges the paperwork to allow Severin to go free. After winning a lottery, the officer resigns, buys a castle, and disguises himself so that he could dedicate his life to serving the boy he shot without him knowing. Severin, however, is still sick with revenge and plots against

the man. Frau von Luber, the housekeeper, was once an aristocrat, but because of the difficult economic times is forced to work. Bitterly, she uses her good-hearted niece Fennimore to discover the relationship between Olim and Severin so that she might exploit it. Severin's friends recognize Olim, and he hides in fear that he might be killed. Frau von Luber uses this to her advantage and convinces Olim to sign the castle over to her, hoping that Severin will kill him. Fennimore, the innocent girl that she is, foils her aunt's plan by reconciling the two men. Frau von Luber, undeterred, throws the men out because she still has ownership of the castle. Olim and Severin plan to throw themselves into the lake to die, but they are stopped by the haunting echo of Fennimore's beautiful voice reminding them of their debt to each other. Spring is just beginning to make its appearance, but the lake is still frozen solid as the men walk across filled with hope (Drew, 238).

The names of the characters may seem a strange mixture of odd names, but they were chosen in order to represent more clearly different nations. Severin is French, Olim is Nordic, and Fennimore is American (in homage to James Fenimore Cooper, writer of *The Last of the Mohicans*). The villains of the opera are obviously German, distinctly with names like von Luber (Hirsch, 101). Despite Frau von Luber's underhanded rise to power once again, Olim and Severin are able to reconcile and walk together as friends under the guiding voice of Fennimore. The title of the work itself was not simply a "winter fairytale," perhaps to call to mind a fanciful Shakespearean drama. In actuality, German audiences were more likely to recall the more modern and far more socially applicable *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* by Heinrich Heine, a verse-epic depicting

the darkness of nineteenth-century Germany (Taylor, 187). Heine's work had been banned in a time of German censorship.

There are several musical examples within the show that illustrate Kaiser and Weill's frustrations towards the increasingly oppressive government. Still writing in a style very similar to that of his early *Royal Palace*, the composer embraced the thought-provoking material through his use of traditionally highbrow operatic techniques coupled with lowbrow characters, plot, libretto, and even sentiment. The opening of act two displays Fennimore in two musical pieces back to back in which she describes the collaborator's meaning perfectly. She begins with 'Fennimore's Lied,' a melancholic moan about her lot. She tires of living in a home that is not hers; it is no way to live, "but then you've not much option when you're poor." This is starkly contrasted by her stately "Cäsars Tod" ("Caesar's Death"), a ballad in which she recounts the rise of Caesar's power and his swift fall by the hand of his own people (Drew, 238). The theatergoers were well aware that the tyrant was no longer in their history or even on stage, but was destroying their way of life in the real world outside the theater.

Before the youths have stolen from the local grocery store in the first act, two shop girls complain about the tragic circumstances that have befallen them in such economic times. In "Der Song der beiden Verkäuferinnen" ("Song of the Shop Girls"), the girls lament that they must get rid of the excess food that they do not sell rather than giving it to the hungry. They attempt to convince the starving people that it isn't their fault and that they aren't unfeeling.

The short duct has much to offer in way of analysis in respect to the style of Weill's compositions. Truly a fusion between opera and what he called song, both

elements of his past Busonian techniques and present Brechtian persuasions are present, as well as new stylistic qualities of his own. The two voices continually compliment each other in a way that makes the text clear and understandable, a definitive characteristic of the composer. When singing together, they are either in unison or in simple thirds, only on a few necessary occasions branching out of this pattern. Each girl does not sing for an extended period of time; each line bounces off the other almost in an antiphonal fashion. The girls are dependent upon each other, and therefore so is their duet. Weill's compositional strength was seen in his harmonic creations rather than in his melodies, especially with quite a bit of borrowing and adapting from other composers and even some of Brecht's works. The intricate legato structure throughout this duet, however, represents a new development in his stylistic repertoire.

Beneath the vocal line, the lush harmonies coupled with the ostinato rhythmic pattern are unmistakably Weill in nature. He also adds a signature twist by breaking the piece into two clearly discernable parts, the first of which is a somber oompa, echoed by the oboe. Full orchestra comes in for the second part, a tiny refrain, underlining the girls singing, "*only appearances are what you may not lose.*" For such a small refrain, Weill emphasized the dramatic change with both full orchestra and a quicker, "brisk waltz" tempo, as indicated in the score (seen in Figure 7).



**Figure 7: Transition to waltz in “Song der beiden Verkäuferinnen”**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*. Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Song der beiden Verkäuferinnen" by Kurt Weill. The score is written for voice and piano. The piano part is in 3/4 time and features a section labeled "Echter Walzer". The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with a tempo marking of "temp. 1".

The timing for this not so subtle political work couldn't have been more appropriate, or worse. The show opened on February 18, 1933, shortly after Adolf Hitler had been appointed Chancellor of Germany on January 30. The political message did not escape the Nazis, and demonstrations were held at every showing. These demonstrations killed the work in Magdeburg and Erfurt, but Leipzig held strong for sixteen performances before it was banned on March 4. Weill and Kaiser saw these sixteen performances as a huge triumph. It was even said that the applause and cheers of the fans dramatically outweighed boos and whistles of the Nazi demonstrators.

Unfortunately for Weill and many of his colleagues, history would compel them from their home country and into exile, fleeing for their lives. This was Weill's last performance in Germany. After his show was forced closed on March 4, Weill was

warned to leave Berlin, despite the success of his show even among some German National Socialists (Hirsch, 107). He left immediately for Munich, but on March 21, three days before the enactment of Hitler's Enabling Act, Weill left Germany for good after being threatened with arrest and headed to Paris. He left alone; Lenya was still living with her lover. Weill hoped that France would offer him a friendlier stage on which he could perform.

## CHAPTER IV

### “Neid” from *Die Sieben Todsünden*

Weill left for Paris with little more than a suitcase, but his mind was always a step ahead. Marie-Laure de Noailles and her husband were pleased to help the bright composer that had splendidly provided entertainment for their *La Sérénade* in December 1932. After staying a few weeks in a hotel, the patrons invited him to stay in a suite in their townhouse, and he enjoyed their hospitality through the summer. Financially, he was beginning to suffer. Due to the fact that his works were banned throughout Germany, his publisher, Universal Edition, was making little to nothing on sheet music sales. When the company tried to terminate his contract, the composer threatened to sue. They settled on cutting his already meager 1,000 marks in half (Taylor, 197). Weill might have been in good hands with his patrons, but his accounts were quickly dwindling.

His popularity in France saved him almost immediately upon his arrival. He had only been in Paris since March 23, and by the first week of April was approached for a commission. A new ballet troupe had formed under two Russian defectors, George Balanchine and Boris Kochno, calling themselves *Les Ballets 1933*. Behind this troupe was another patron, a man who had been a spectator at Weill's previous Parisian engagement of the Noailles. Edward James, the descendent of English royalty, used his

sizeable inheritance to support not only his love of art, but also his love of his wife, Tilly Losch. An Austrian prima ballerina, Losch would be the star of the troupe, and James sought in Weill a work that could display her talents (Hirsch, 109). Unfortunately for Weill, it wasn't just the composer of *Mahagony Songspiel* that James required; he envisioned another work by the three hotshots of Berlin, Weill, Brecht, and Neher, and Lenya to costar with Losch. Despite his protestations and attempts to bring other collaborators, Weill was unable to sway the mind of his benefactor, and he wrote to Brecht.

Much like Weill, Brecht had been forced to immigrate with his wife Helene Weigel and their son Stefan to Vienna, and then to Switzerland. Unlike Weill, however, he had no particular thought in mind for how he was to survive without Berlin audiences. He accepted Weill's proposal because he was in desperate need of money (Hirsch, 110). Neher was strangely much more difficult to obtain. He and his wife had continued to live in Berlin because they were uninteresting to the political press once he was unstained by Brecht's company and his controversial Marxist views. Claiming that he was unhappy with the text, the scenographer refused. Weill complained through letters to his lover, Erika, that her husband failed to see the full picture. The composer pleaded with them to have confidence in him because "every text I've set looks entirely different once it's been swept through my music" (Hirsch, 112). Neher finally relented.

Lenya was not difficult to obtain. Weill loved her dearly, and he was happy to invite her to be a part of the project, no matter how painful her presence would be for him personally. She arrived, unsurprisingly, with her lover, Pasetti, who would take a role himself in the show. She was the lynchpin of the show. The reasons that James required

her performance were two-fold. He was entranced by her performance in *Mahagonny Songspiel* and had noticed that she strongly resembled his wife, Losch. James harbored an idea for a show in which two women represented two sides of one, thus mirroring the Freudian split personality (Taylor, 198). It was Brecht who formulated the idea of a singer and a dancer. Lenya would be Anna I, the practical side portrayed through a singer; Losch would be Anna II, the side subjected to the sins of the world through a dancer. It was not the first time Weill had composed for a plot based on identity, as the idea was distantly reminiscent of his work with Kaiser on *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* in 1928 and the characters of Angèle and False Angèle.

The *ballet chanté* came to be called *Die Sieben Todsünden (The Seven Deadly Sins)*, a 'spectacle in nine scenes,' including a prelude, seven scenes, and a postlude. Two sisters, Anna I and Anna II, are on their way to seven different cities in America to find work so that they might send money back to their family in Louisiana on the Mississippi River. Anna II falls prey to each deadly sin, one for each city, while Anna I scolds her for her vulnerability. Finally, the sisters make their way home with what they had spent seven years working to obtain (Drew, 244-5).

Brecht proved to be the nuisance that Weill knew him to be. He was not pleased with the topic, and the composer bent to his tantrum and allowed him to rework it as a Marxist platform (Hirsch, 111). In Brecht's political adaptation, Anna II becomes a sinful person under the capitalist eyes of Anna I because of her kindness, honesty, and sincerity, rather than the two women based solely on the inner struggle of one person. These traits obstruct Anna I's need and ability to make money. Once again, the story is set in a fictional "Amerika," and the sisters visit cities like Memphis, San Francisco, and

Boston, cities the creators had never seen. Brecht stayed in France long enough to write the libretto, which turned out to be only about ten days. He was completely unknown in France and he hardly spoke the language. Brecht was not used to being so far away from his adoring public and he hated collaborating with Weill once again, so he left as soon as he possibly could. He was also turned off by the fact that *Die Sieben Todsünden* was not only commissioned by an aristocrat, but also knowing that it would be performed in the elegant Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in front of the wealthy bourgeoisie. His best hope of retaining his Marxist credit was to take the money and run (Hirsch, 113).

Even after he left, Brecht's involvement in the project caused problems. He had left a cryptic libretto that gave no instruction to the dancers. In fact, when reading it alone, the general lack of direction leaves the reader wondering if he had intended it for performance at all (Hirsch, 113). It is not difficult to imagine that Brecht's vagueness was intentional as he still harbored aggravated feelings towards Weill. Balanchine's dancers were aggravated with such little guidance, but the team of collaborators still working in France filled in the gaps, and Weill supplied a consistent musical background that would ensure cohesiveness.

*Die Sieben Todsünden* represents a true transitional project for Weill because it serves as a work he wrote during his exile but in an undoubtedly Germanic voice. While working under a stream of continual music, he incorporated all the music of his German past. The tango, the foxtrot, the marches, as well as his signature ostinato rhythmic patterns were all present in different forms throughout the work. There was no hint of pop tune commercialism anywhere within it, something he was borderline frantic about in his earlier works. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Weill could see that his

publishing contract was coming to a close. Nevertheless, *Die Sieben Todsünden* showed a new side of the composer, bidding his adieu to Germany.

In the final scene before the postlude, Anna I and Anna II come to their last stop of the journey in San Francisco. It is here that Anna II experiences envy in “Neid.” She has grown envious of all those she has seen on her trip that were allowed to enjoy each of the seven sins. Anna I rebukes her by saying, “Think what would happen if you did what you felt like doing,” and she frightens her with threats of hell. Weill fashioned a family quartet waiting for the sisters in Louisiana to musically follow them through their journey. These men (two brothers, a father, and a basso in drag as the mother) represented the capitalist consumers, the people who fed off Anna and continually spit out biblical passages to support their laziness. Fortunately for Weill, he was able to write in a way that masked Brecht’s angry subtext. Maurice Abravanel, the show’s conductor, remarked, “The great thing about Kurt is that he could take any text and by the time it was set to music, the dogma was forgotten, no matter how Marxist Brecht became... You see the fruits of Brecht’s Marxist studies. But with Weill it becomes about human beings” (Hirsch, 116).

The growth of the German composer is seen very clearly in “Neid.” His characteristic verse to refrain technique has matured into resembling more of a recitative and aria format. The piece begins with Anna I narrating their journey in a calm tone, underlined by a dry accompaniment from the orchestra. A dramatic shift in music represents the shift in characters as Anna I sings about what Anna II feels. She shouts that she is envious of those around her in a repetitive, simplistic melody, supported by a shouting orchestra. The music softens as Anna I returns to herself, and the ‘aria’ begins

with one of Weill's typical marches. Anna I demoralizes her sister, and Anna II is forced to repent before they come home. Before the piece ends, the family quartet comes in for a Greek chorus effect just to emphasize, "Whoever wins over themselves also wins the wage." This is seen in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Greek chorus effect in "Neid"**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Die Sieben Todsünden der Kleinburger; Ballet chante*. Mainz, New York: Schott music Corp. c.1956.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Neid" from Kurt Weill's *Die Sieben Todsünden der Kleinburger; Ballet chante*. The score is written for voice and piano. It features two vocal parts, Anna I and Anna II, and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in German. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes the vocal lines and piano accompaniment for the first part of the piece. The second system continues the vocal lines and piano accompaniment for the second part of the piece. The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand and a left hand, with various chords and melodic lines. The vocal lines are written in a standard staff with a treble clef. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines. The score is marked with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

Lyrics for the first system:  
 Anna I: ... und ... Neid, ... ver ... schlosserer ... Teil ...  
 Anna II: ... Wei ... her ...  
 Piano: ...

Lyrics for the second system:  
 Anna I: ... der ...  
 Anna II: ...  
 Piano: ...



Weill was no longer trying to fully meld the music to the text. Brecht had left the scene and did not care for the production other than the monetary benefit, thus burdening the composer with all the responsibility. This is not to say that Weill's music did not support the meaning of the libretto: it did, however, develop its own distinct voice that could stand on its own merits. In fact, there are moments during dance sequences in which the music takes over the scene as its own character. A ballet was the perfect breakthrough for Weill to come out from underneath the drama both in his personal life and within the plot and display his compositional talents.

Although the show seemed to have the perfect elements for success, it ended up being too German for the Parisian audience. They were, after all, performing in German, making the meaning incomprehensible to a majority of the public. It was also too much in between genres, both dance and music alike, for the Parisian purists. Unfortunately for the composer, his failure in France was mirrored in other countries as well. Weill's international fame was dwindling. News from America told him of a disappointing failure to run *Die Dreigroschenoper* on Broadway, and a London version (this time in English translation) of *The Seven Deadly Sins* received just as many complaints about the show as France had given. The show was a flop.

## CHAPTER V

### “Je ne t’aime pas”

The tragic failure of *Die Sieben Todsünden* in the summer of 1933 was punctuated by continual bad fortune for the once-famous Berlin composer. In September, his divorce from Lenya was finalized. A few weeks later, unable to make any money on Weill, Universal negotiated the end of his contract, and Weill was left without an employer. He was able to secure a new French publisher, Heugel, a month later, but Universal still held rights to all his works he had written to that date.

Weill’s popularity in Paris was still recognizable. Ever since the June 1933 premiere of a concert version of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in Paris, even before Weill had emigrated there, it was reported to him that people were whistling the ‘Mackie Messer’ song. He had, however, become completely reliant on public opinion of his work. Any negative reviews could turn the crowd against him, and he would have to start again from the bottom. In November, a performance of three songs in French from *Der Silbersee* was very well received. The crowd earnestly cheered for the composer and some called out for more, yet from somewhere within the crowd, Florent Schmitt led a group of people to shout “Vive Hitler!” (Hirsch, 118). Weill, horrified, feared that his time in France would be cut short by the increasingly hostile environment that was sweeping throughout Europe.

The threat of anti-Semitism in Paris was real and Weill's fear was rational, but he refused to let the political tension interfere with his art. The composer would continue to work until forced to leave, just as he did in Berlin. Weill kept his eyes open for any new possibilities. Lys Gauty, a popular French singer, had done concert versions of Weill's work in 1933, specifically songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper*. She had become fond of his work and, in 1934, she commissioned a song from him. The response was "Complainte de la Seine," a raunchy cabaret piece that showed the dirty side of French life (Drew, 261). Gauty was so pleased by the success of it, that she asked for another so that she might record them both for commercial purposes.

Weill quickly wrote "Je ne t'aime pas", a companion piece to "Complainte de la Seine." It is suspected that Weill did not put all of himself into this project because it contains few of his favorite compositional techniques. The reasons for this could be many. At this time, Weill was constantly traveling, feeling increasingly unsettled. His divorce from Lenya was weighing heavily on him, and the increasing political hostility was certainly not the least of his problems. It is possible that he was concentrating on surviving rather than composing for musical integrity.

Despite the lack of the weightier elements of Weill's style, "Je ne t'aime pas" still retains artistic elements that make it a hauntingly moving piece. He captured the style of French cabaret tradition within the tango rhythms, as well as emphasized and supported the text with a strophic form, a technique common to all his vocal works. Just as he had done in "Seeräuberjenny," Weill included a portion of spoken text over his accompaniment (Figure 9). This time, however, the piano voice carries on with the overriding melody as the singer speaks, giving equal weight to words and music. The

effect is stunningly emotional, allowing the singer to be as realistic in her portrayal of the piece as possible. She is constantly trying to tell herself that she does not love a man, but she is unconvincing as she describes his attributes that she loves.

**Figure 9: Inclusion of spoken text in “Je ne t’aime pas”**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*. Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Je ne t'aime pas". The first system features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The vocal line is written in a single treble clef above the piano part, with lyrics: "Je ne t'aime pas... ou si l'ut in-grat...". The second system continues the piano accompaniment, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and the vocal line with lyrics: "in-me e di-sant ne sois pas char-mant. Je ne t'ai-me pas...". The piano part consists of chords and moving lines in both hands, while the vocal line is a single melodic line.

“Je ne t’aime pas” represents Weill’s personal and professional struggles and his effort to maintain his artistic career in a new country. The passion within this piece suggests that perhaps he was thinking of Lenya as he wrote it. The two never stopped communicating and they knew they never would. Lenya had left him broken and lonely, and Weill continued to pine for her beneath the surface while maintaining his professional and personal composure. Just as his song mourns, “I do not love you. Oh, my beloved.”

## CHAPTER VI

### “Le train du ciel” from *Marie galante*

Weill continued to travel rather than settle in Paris, still not comfortable enough to call France his home. He went to Rome in December of 1933 to see the openings of *Mahagonny* and *Der Jasager*, staged as they had also been performed in their Paris premieres. His parents had immigrated to Czechoslovakia to avoid Nazi harassment, and he spent the first five days of 1934 visiting them. Weill was unsettled in both his life and his musical style, as seen in the vastly different works he juggled at the time. Three dramatically unrelated projects had presented themselves to the composer around the same time. In the final days of 1933, Max Reinhardt, a fellow German émigré, proposed collaboration on the biblical *Der Weg der Verheißung*, later entitled *The Eternal Road*, a curious subject for the non-practicing Jew. Robert Vambery contacted the composer with the idea of *Der Kuhhandel* (*The Cow Trade*), a Parisian operetta, and in August of the same year, Weill would spend little more than a month working on music for author Jacques Deval's *Marie galante*. He may have been in high demand, but Weill was still struggling to survive as a German in France.

Although he was busy with work on both *Der Weg der Verheißung* and his pet project of *Der Kuhhandel*, Heugel proposed that he take on Jacques Deval as well. Deval was a favorite French author whose novel *Marie galante* had become a bestseller. The

author had already had some success as a playwright, and he wished to make more money on his popular novel.

The subject of the book was attractive enough. A French prostitute, Marie, is abducted from Paris by Captain Letuvier and taken on his cargo ship bound to South America. When she refuses to succumb to his advances, the captain abandons her in Venezuela, the first place the ship docks. Searching for a way back to France, she makes her way to Panama where she prostitutes herself so that she can afford the steamer ticket back home. After befriendng an elderly and dying black man named Josiah, she spends her earnings caring for him instead. The money for her ticket falls into her lap when she takes part accidentally in an espionage plot, but she is murdered on the eve of her departure (Drew, 268).

“Le train du ciel” is a lullaby Marie sings to Josiah as he dies. She begs him to look into the sky for the train to heaven, ready to take him aboard it. Although Weill hurried through his compositions for this work, he left many characteristic hints of his musical style throughout. The soothing song is separated into two distinct sections, made even clearer by his use of repeats in the first half. The form AAB emphasizes Weill’s attachment to a dramatic split in his music. The piece begins at an almost unbearably slow *lento*, gradually picking up speed as she sings of the train. This is an evident use of word painting with a blatant ostinato pattern that evokes sounds of a train approaching, which can be seen in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Word painting effect in “Le train du ciel”**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*, Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Le train du ciel". Each system consists of a vocal line (soprano and alto staves) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass staves). The first system is marked with a forte dynamic (*f*) and includes the instruction "multi string" above the piano part. The second system is marked with a piano dynamic (*p*). The piano accompaniment features lush, dense harmonic textures, particularly in the lower register, which contribute to the word painting effect described in the text.

The second half of the piece is much more relaxed. The train has arrived and Marie looks into her own vision to see who is taken aboard the train to heaven. The melody is somber and heartfelt. She deeply hurts for the loss of her friend, and Weill mirrors her pain in his distinctively lush harmonies.

Weill was not at all happy with his arrangement to compose for Deval. For one, the composer was not convinced that the novel had much potential for commercial

success. He remained hopeful, though, because it was to be performed in Paris, London, and New York. He told Lenya, "It looks as if this might be the big international opportunity I've been waiting for" (Hirsch, 119). He soon realized his folly. Deval proved to be a more difficult collaborator than even Brecht (Hirsch, 120). He spent his advance from the show before it was written and did little to help Weill in the creative process. The libretto was completed quickly, and as soon as it was done, Deval left the composer to write the show by himself. Consequently, there was little correlation between the libretto and music and there was no trace of exciting musical theater that Weill enjoyed creating. The composer spent little more than a month on the project and was happy to be done with it.

After the production premiered, it was clear that Weill's assumptions had been correct. The show failed on the basis that the music and the libretto, awkwardly thrust upon each other, made the audiences feel equally awkward. Several of the songs, however, became instant hits in the Parisian crowds and Heugel enjoyed the success of printing "Le train du ciel" and "J'attends un navire." Weill was relatively unhurt by the failure because he was much more invested in his work on *Der Kuhhandel*.

Paris was overrun with exiled German artists, looking for a place to call home. Like Weill, they knew that other cultural high spots like Prague and Vienna were too closely linked to the German political situation. Although he was not necessarily looking for another German collaborator, it was just a matter of time before Robert Vambéry, the main dramaturg for Ernst Josef Aufricht's theatre, approached him with a tempting new project.



Vambery's story, titled *Der Kuhhandel* (*The Cow Traders*) was politically charged as many of Weill's previous works had been and presented many new challenges to the composer. Taking place in the Caribbean, two nations live happily together before an American salesman instigates an arms race between them. Meanwhile, Juan and Juanita, two young lovers, are dependent upon their cow for survival. When it is taken from them as a war tax, they are forced to take up difficult jobs to earn enough money to purchase their cow back. Juan becomes a soldier and Juanita must become a prostitute. The American's weapons are ineffective and, therefore a new dictator takes over and declares the war over. In the meantime, Juan and Juanita had earned enough money to buy a cow and the story ends happily (Drew, 253).

The history of the show itself was not so happy. Like the fate of *Die Sieben Todsünden*, the French did not appreciate Vambery's German libretto, regardless of Weill's liberal Offenbach references and his strictly Parisian melodic flavor. He was unable to get the show off the ground because no opera house would take it. Weill had thrown all of his heart into the work and was unwilling to let it go. Assuming the language was a problem, he took his producer's suggestion and began working on a British version for a premier in London. Despite his efforts, he once again was mixed up with a difficult writer. Vambery was, in Weill's opinion, unbearably lazy, refusing to make English translations in an acceptable period of time (Hirsch, 122). The producer was forced to commission new lyrics and a new book.

After changing the music to mirror the sounds of England – making use of several techniques that were popular in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas – the show, now under the English title *A Kingdom for a Cow*, was an unmistakable failure. The British audience

was not interested in Weill's works. Just as they had responded negatively to his *Mahagonny* the year before, his faux British work failed to impress them. It was this disappointment that deeply hurt the composer on a personal level; he had spent a tremendous amount of time and effort on this work only for it to be dismissed abruptly.

The growing antagonism towards Weill and his political views in France threatened him at every moment, but he found happiness due to his reunion with the woman who supported him throughout his career. Lenya's affair with Pasetti had ended and she returned to Weill who remained emotionally devoted to her. The two planned to travel to America together to work on Max Reinhardt's *Der Weg der Verheißung*; Weill was to compose and Lenya to act. Reinhardt, already establishing his career in Hollywood and New York, decided that the show would be better performed in front of an American audience. The show suffered many alterations to prepare it for a journey across the sea, including a change in title to *The Eternal Road*. Weill and Lenya boarded the *S. S. Majestic* for New York in September of 1934.

It seemed that everything that could have gone wrong with the show did. By this time, the massive biblical epic of *The Eternal Road* was retranslated for the American stage. He had abandoned the work for a few years because his fellow collaborators, specifically the writer Franz Werfel and the scenographer Norman Bel Geddes, had made the process of creating a show unbearable due to their immense differences with the composer. Weill constantly found himself having to defend the integrity of his work, a routine that quickly became tiresome. It was the composer's opinion that such a grand work required music that was equally grand, and he therefore worked on operatic music that would be sung by professionally trained singers. His music was immediately sliced

and chopped by the collaborative team who greatly disagreed. The musical epic was not well received. Although the work was the product of a very painful and drawn-out process that he had hoped would bring him great success, Weill was happy to be free of it. As he looked for new compositional opportunities, the composer hoped for a better chance of success.

## CHAPTER VII

### “My Ship” from *Lady in the Dark*

America proved to be a daunting but exciting place for Weill and Lenya. The couple had not planned to stay in New York; once *The Eternal Road* was declared bankrupt in January 1936, they had fully expected to return to Paris. The seduction of New York’s city lights was far too strong, however, and Weill and Lenya reconsidered (Hirsch, 136). After all, his Parisian success was limited and inconsistent. Even before his days with Brecht, the composer had been fascinated with the exotic sounds of America, especially the emerging jazz genre and the music of Broadway.

Immediately upon his arrival to the United States, Weill began to actively attend showings of Broadway and opera works. The flavor of true American music had yet to permeate his creative brain, and he hungered for the knowledge of what Americans wanted. The works that he saw convinced him that the worst thing for his ambitions to be a serious American composer was *The Eternal Road*, a production entirely manned by foreign artists. He cut his losses and searched for new projects.

Over the course of the next few years, the composer would be involved in a number of projects, most of which were not extremely successful. One exception is his excellent work on the musical *Johnny Johnson*, an excessively nationalistic anti-war cry for the common man. Weill was commended for his beautiful score that held the show

together, but a long string of scenography problems as well as collaborative differences among the creative team ended the musical's run.

In 1938, writer Maxwell Anderson approached Weill in the hopes of collaborating on a musical version of his adaptation of Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker History of New York*, a political attack on Roosevelt's New Deal. The performance enjoyed good reviews, and Weill's show stopping number "September Song" was an instant smash hit whose popularity continues today. The show as a whole, however, did little to secure a spot among Broadway's elite circles. Anderson was as yet an amateur lyricist, putting most of the emphasis on Weill's music. The failure of cohesion between the book and the orchestrations left the show as little more than an evening of entertainment.

His luck changed in 1939 when the composer was introduced to the successful and influential Broadway director and playwright Moss Hart. After a few discussions, the two minds agreed to work together on a project. The duo was a doubtful pair; Weill liberally broke new ground in musical standards and continued to live up to his *enfant terrible* title from his former days in Germany. Hart could not have been more different with his conservative tastes in theater. The director even insisted upon their collaborative piece focusing on his book rather than the music (Hirsch, 181). Despite this seemingly difficult setback, Weill was by now adept in the trade of persuading inflexible colleagues (i.e. Brecht, Duval, etc.), and he already put plans forth to change Hart's mind.

The playwright had already written a straight play entitled *I Am Listening*, based on his own psychoanalysis and dreams that came from it (Hirsch, 182). The plot follows Liza Elliot and her mental troubles. As she reclines on her therapist's couch, Liza recounts her troubles with remembering a melody to a song but not the lyrics. Through a

series of dream sequences, she delves deeper and deeper into her subconscious to retrieve the lyrics. The play had only one opportunity for music: the tormenting song. Weill used his negotiating skills to convince Hart otherwise. "The music could describe the {heroine's} dreams," Weill demanded (Hirsch, 182).

Hart called in his old friend and lyricist Ira Gershwin to join forces with Weill on his 'straight play' that was speedily developing into a full-blown musical. The dynamic duo created something similar to the format of three short one-act operas in order to recreate the protagonist's dreams. The transition from reality to a dream state offered an interesting compositional opportunity for Weill. No amount of special effects could compare to his sweepingly dramatic orchestration that brought each dream into play and then steered them to a crashing close. Aaron Copland talked to Maurice Abravanel, the show's conductor, about Weill's orchestral technique and observed, "It's amazing how quickly Kurt Weill gets from the realistic play scenes...to the dreams." After asking what instruments were used to do this, Abravanel replied that it was just the clarinet: "Damn, we slave six months to get a thing like that, and Kurt does it with two notes on the clarinet" (Hirsch, 186).

The dream sequences are elaborate twenty-minute spectacles depicting Liza's three large metaphoric dreams. The first sequence, the 'Glamour Dream,' shows both the excitement and trepidation that Liza feels as editor at *Allure Magazine*. The 'Wedding Dream' allows her to fantasize about marriage. The third and final dream, the 'Circus Dream,' is by far the most imaginative both musically and theatrically. Two of the most famous songs, both still sung today, come from this sequence. Liza is brought into a circus court and stands trial for not being able to make up her mind about what kind of

woman she wants to be. After the ringmaster sings a strangely impromptu “Tchaikovsky, And Other Russians,” Liza launches into “The Saga of Jenny,” a jazzy, slightly raucous tale of the misfortunes of a girl named Jenny when she made up her mind.

Each of the dream sequences would end in the same manner. As Liza would begin to recall the melody of her forgotten song (Figure 11), she would hum the opening bars and then the dream would come to an abrupt halt.

**Figure 11: “My Ship” melody**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*. Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.



In the final scene, the psychiatrist takes her to a childhood memory where she recognizes that her issues stem from problems with her father. The song she had been desperately trying to remember finally materializes into “My Ship,” the beginning lyrics of which can be seen in Figure 12. This song, sweetly melodious, serves as a transition from dream to reality, fulfilling Weill’s wish for useful music. The simple melody is beautifully haunting, perfectly keeping the question of whether Liza’s ship will come in or not a mystery. The final chords cascade down and include color chords, most commonly close tertian harmony in minor seventh chords, that suggest an ominous forecast, but they finally resolve for a happy ending.

**Figure 12: “My Ship” melody with remembered lyrics**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*. Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.

This image shows the musical notation for "My Ship" with lyrics and accompaniment. It is a three-staff arrangement. The top staff is the melody with lyrics underneath. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment on a treble clef, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment on a bass clef. The time signature is common time (C). The melody is simple and haunting, while the accompaniment consists of chords and rhythmic patterns.

*Lady in the Dark* was precisely the hit for which Weill had been waiting. Although at times it seemed to be a strange collection of songs that did not completely fit together within a singular production (the “Tchaikovsky” number, for example, was only included to feature a role for Danny Kaye and cater to his comedic talents rather than to add exclusively drama to the show (Hirsch, 192)), the combination of the songs and story, as well as the star-studded cast, had the perfected blend of the right components to comprise the ideal musical. Audiences wildly enjoyed the celebrities and the array of musical spectacles. Weill had finally achieved a triumph on the American stage, and he was ready for more.



## CHAPTER VIII

### “Speak Low” from *One Touch of Venus*

Riding on the success of *Lady in the Dark*, Weill knew exactly what kind of show to write in order to be a triumph. The composer was quick to jump into a new project with a new team, aching for more American victories. Before rushing back to the stage, Weill decided to add what he could to the war effort. Between February and April 1942, the composer composed *Songs for the War Effort*, eight patriotic vocal works (Farneth, 198). His songs not only made visible his public dedication to America and his renouncement of Germany, but also proudly displayed his association with an array of popular American lyricists, such as Maxwell Anderson and Oscar Hammerstein.

Later that year, Weill himself began to work on a project that he was convinced would become a great hit. Working under The Group Theatre, a production collective headed by Cheryl Crawford, the composer offered up the material from the little-known book *The Tinted Venus* by Thomas Antsey Guthrie (Hirsch, 210). The story followed a statue of Venus that came to life after a hairdresser jokingly placed a wedding ring on the marble finger. At Weill's suggestion, Crawford hired Ogden Nash to write the lyrics. Nash, a humorous American poet, had never worked on a musical before, but Weill knew what he was doing. Nash successfully added comic flavor to a deeply romantic plot, allowing the characters to be more realistic in a very unrealistic plot.

The action seems to be almost trivial in its simplicity. In Manhattan, a rich patron of the arts, Whitelaw Savory, has recently acquired a 3,000 year-old statue of Venus. Savory's barber, Rodney Hatch, waits patiently for his boss. To pass the time, he muses that his girlfriend, Gloria, is much more beautiful than the statue, and he places the ring he had bought for her on the marble finger, and Venus comes to life. Not only is she alive, but also the ring has made her fall in love with Rodney. The frightened barber flees, hotly pursued by Venus. In a swift move, she uses her supernatural powers to rid Rodney of his undesirable girlfriend and her mother. Venus and Rodney eventually fall in love with each other, but they quickly realize that there are obvious problems with their relationship. She does not see herself as a housewife, and he could not live in the world of the gods. Venus sadly returns to her immortal world leaving Rodney in the mortal world. Sometime thereafter, Rodney visits the Venus statue reminiscing when a perfectly mortal woman that looks just like his marble beauty approaches him, leaving the audience with a happy ending after all (Drew, 333).

Originally, Weill and Crawford had set their eyes upon the lovely German bombshell Marlene Dietrich to play Venus. After leading the men on by attending preliminary rehearsals and commenting on her affection for Weill's music, the diva decided that the role was far too inappropriate for a woman who had been a mother for some time at that point. She hotly confronted them about Venus' sexuality, going so far as to have said, "The show is too sexy and profane." In an uncharacteristic show of anger, Weill shouted in reply, "How dare you? Have you lost your sense of values?" (Hirsch, 215) The fact that the composer considered Dietrich to be without values because she refused to be erotically provocative on stage was ironic, and it showed that

Weill's own sense of values prioritized his work. With Dietrich no longer an option, Weill and his team began looking in a completely new direction and found the young Mary Martin. She was not known for her sexy sophistication like Dietrich; in fact, she was more the proverbial "girl next door" (Hirsch, 216). After rehearsing with her, the production team found that Dietrich had been right all along: the show was too sexy for her. The matter-of-fact sexuality would have been vulgar with Dietrich, but with the youthful, sweet image of Martin, it was perfect.

As in all of the productions in which Weill had taken part, there was trouble within the collaborative group. Elia Kazan, a man with no musical background, had been chosen to direct the show. His inexperience was palpable and his mistakes often unnerved and even angered the actors. Fortunately, the renowned Agnes de Mille, another key member of the team, knew the ropes of how to produce successful musicals and was willing to step up and take charge along with Weill (Hirsch, 219). De Mille, fresh from the Broadway smash hit *Oklahoma!*, walked onto the production of *One Touch of Venus*. She had created the incredible and groundbreaking ballet at the end of the first act of the Rodgers and Hammerstein masterpiece, and at this point, her fame exceeded that of any other person on the *Venus* set, except Weill himself. She used her reputation as both a platform and an excuse for co-directing the show along with the inept Kazan (Hirsch, 219). De Mille and Weill worked on a ballet scene in *Venus* that, in her opinion, rivaled the work she had done with *Oklahoma!*. Just after Rodney realizes that he loves Venus, she begins fantasizing what her life would be like as the wife of a barber. De Mille's elegant ballet shows the goddess' growing dissatisfaction with such a boring

life, moving towards the pivotal plot point where she decides that she cannot stay with poor Rodney.

Characteristically, Weill composed several songs within the show hoping for commercialization. "Kurt wanted money...he was mad for success," de Mille once commented (Hirsch, 222). Many of his *Venus* songs reached the hit charts, but only a few have survived in popularity today. After coming to life, Venus is confused as to why Rodney does not instantly love her and she feels alienated from the new world with strange customs. It has been suggested that her song, "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," mirrors the separation that Weill felt after his arrival to America. The sultry melody is reminiscent of "Saga of Jenny," but seems to have a darker, edgier, sexier swing.

"Speak Low," written as a duet between Rodney and Venus, serves as a crucial transition piece for the moment the two fall in love. Here, Weill pulls a similar theme from his "September Song," emphasizing that there is little time to lose with love at hand. Unlike most of his popular songs, "Speak Low" is not in strophic form, nor is it in two separated parts. He adopts the idiom of the ABA form which was, and still is, extremely common in the American popular music genre, and his use of it greatly increased the chances of it becoming a successful solo piece. The duet also contains strong Weillian characteristics, especially the melancholic melody that hauntingly hangs over a cabaret orchestration. Unlike the style of a typical love song, there is continued foreshadowing of impending loss throughout the piece that is echoed in Nash's lyrics: "*Time is so old and love so brief. Love is pure gold and time a thief.*" This can be seen in Figure 13.

**Figure 13: Impending loss lyrics in “Speak Low”**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*. Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Speak Low". Each system consists of three staves: a vocal line in treble clef, a piano accompaniment in treble clef, and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The first system includes the lyrics "and we so brief." The second system includes the lyrics "I've got to go and time is that we're late". The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the first system. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks.

Despite the irritation caused by the inexperienced director, the show was an instant hit when it premiered on October 7, 1943, running longer than any Weill show to date. For the composer, success on the Broadway stage was intoxicating. Although reviews were mixed, and often critics accused the show of not specifying which audience the show was targeting, Weill's score and de Mille's choreography were highly praised. Mary Martin's flawless performance had stolen the hearts of the theatergoers.

To the rising composer, the greatest aspect of his success in *One Touch of Venus* was the fact that he had done it on his own. Without the guidance of Moss Hart and Ira Gershwin, Weill had called all the shots and even began the project himself. The confidence that was awarded him from this production was enough to last the rest of his

short life. Weill knew that he had what it took to be a great Broadway composer, and he had officially reached a greater popularity at that time than he had done in Germany with *Die Dreigroschenoper*. To have risen to fame in one country, start over again in a new country with different customs, styles, and language, and still be able to rise to the same and even greater fame than before was a huge accomplishment that few could and can claim.

## CHAPTER IX

### “Song of the Rhineland” from *Where Do We Go From Here?*

Certainly the Broadway stage in New York displayed the greatest devotion to Weill’s work in America, but Hollywood also offered the temptation to create even more blended musical genres. Film was not a new theatrical concept for Weill. The composer had spent a great deal of time working on G. W. Pabst’s 1931 adaptation of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and more time following his lawsuit against the production company for breach of contract. The film scandal in Germany had been a brutal and extremely painful experience for both Weill and Brecht, and the fact that he was unafraid to reenter that world is a testament to his drive for success. Hollywood was and is the capital of American celebrity, and if he could conquer the film industry in addition to triumphs on the theatrical stage, he knew that he would reach the height of popularity.

The majority of his movies, however, were never better or even equal to that of the actual staged show version. The biggest obstacle was that Weill had much less control over what the film industry did with his works than with the staged productions, and his scores would often be mutilated for the sake of the action. The irony is that in several cases, including *Lady in the Dark*, the plot had been written to coincide with the music and by cutting the music the producers had suffocated the movie by omitting what actually drove the plot forward.

Despite his disappointments in film, Weill continued to accept offers in the hopes that he would emerge victorious from Hollywood as he had on Broadway. In 1943, the composer collaborated once again with lyricist Ira Gershwin on the film *Where Do We Go From Here?*. Taking place in the creators' modern time, the story focuses on the protagonist Bill Morgan, an extremely patriotic every-man (much like *Johnny Johnson*) who wants desperately to be a part of the war effort, but he is categorized as 4-F, physically unfit. When cleaning various metal donations for the war effort, he releases a genie named Ali from a bronze lamp. Ali, an immortal who is (similar to Venus in *One Touch of Venus*) in the wrong place and time, offers to grant Bill a wish. Unfortunately, his wish-granting mechanism is broken, and Bill is sent time traveling to be in the infantry of George Washington at Valley Forge, onto Columbus' ship, and then a soldier in Nieuw Amsterdam (the same setting as in *Knickerbocker Holiday*). Ali finally fixes his mechanism, and Bill is granted his wish to be back in World War II as a marine (Drew, 346). These changing time periods intrigued both Weill and Gershwin because they presented the opportunity to compose a series of different styles of music for one movie.

One of the most inventive compositional scenes for Weill in this movie came from the Columbus voyage. The scene was entirely through-composed as though it were a scene from an Italian opera, including the typical format of arias, recitatives, and chorus numbers. Weill's ability to camouflage his musical identity with characteristics of other countries combined with Gershwin's witty rhymes about the stereotypes of Italy created a hilarious and lengthy mini-opera. The men had done such an outstanding job on this scene that it was left almost completely unharmed by editors (Taylor, 286).



The film even offered Weill the chance to poke fun at his own home country, Germany. After Bill is transported to George Washington's troops in the second of Ali's mistakes, the patriot realizes that it is just before the notorious Battle of Valley Forge against the Hessians. He sneaks his way into their camp in an effort to leave his mark on history by aiding General Washington in this monumental battle. He comes upon the enemy as they are in a state of great amusement, partying and drinking in their camp with beautiful beer maidens.

The leader of the Hessian troops calls out over the merrymaking for a song about the Rhineland to remind them of home. The actors in the film were obviously not German, so they sing in unfamiliar accents, comically describing a country they had never seen. Gershwin fiercely attacked German stereotypes by including lyrics about beer, blondes, and even the goose step. When describing the Rhineland, he made sure to include that the Hessians thought of their attributes in a superlative manner, suggesting superiority (Figure 14). *"Where the heart is mellow, and the hair is yellower, and the girls is juicier, and the goosestep goosier..."*

**Figure 14: German stereotypes in "Song of the Rhineland"**

Source: Weill, Kurt. *Kurt Weill Songs: A Centennial Anthology*. Vol. 1,2. Los Angeles: Alfred, 1999.



The pidgin English used throughout is reminiscent of Brecht's liberal use of it within his works, such as the "Alabama Song." This time, however, it was not in reverence to a mystical America that only existed in the best of circumstances. Instead, it was used to mock the composer's native tongue. Weill did not intend to be vicious about Germany, but he clearly was drawing a definitive line between his old and his new, glamorous life.

"Song of the Rhineland" served several purposes for the composer. The laughable way in which he and Gershwin represented his countrymen displayed his intense desire to be separated from Germany. Weill wanted Americans to see him as one of their own, not a German or even a former German, but a full-blooded Yankee Doodle, complete with feather in his hat. This scene was also a chance to continue the thread of wartime morality that flowed throughout the film for the 1945 audience.

Written in the style of a drinking song, fully equipped with an oompa orchestration, "Song of the Rhineland" was a grand chorus number that allowed for several solo opportunities as well as elaborate dance choreography. The scene could easily have been sufficient with just a simple, basic waltz underscoring, but Weill, even when composing just to "have fun" (Taylor, 286), still made great efforts to always write his best. Written in Weill's newly favorite ABA form including a short strophic introduction, the song was filled with his typical color chords and chromatic motion.

The film barely made a splash among theatergoers, but Weill considered *Where Do We Go From Here?* a huge step towards fully through-composed films (Drew, 340), especially with the revolutionary nine minutes of unending music in the Columbus scene.

Despite his enthusiasm towards his film music, he was a practical man and therefore turned his attention back to what paid, namely, New York's musical theater.

## CHAPTER X

### “What Good Would the Moon Be?” from *Street Scene*

Just as he had when he was researching performances following his arrival in New York, Weill attended as many Broadway musicals and opera performances as he could in his free time. During this time, Weill attended the October 1935 production of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, the perfect model for the style Weill was working to develop. Gershwin's through-composed music was a mix between opera and musical drama, and it also gave voice to common African Americans' struggle to survive at that time. Having seen Gershwin's production, Weill made a goal to compose an American opera for Broadway.

The straight play *Street Scene* by Elmer Rice had premiered in New York in 1929, and seeing a production after he had immigrated to America, Weill was highly touched by the emotion of the piece. When working on *Knickerbocker Holiday*, Weill had the opportunity to talk to Rice and suggested setting his play to music. Rice initially refused, fearing that his play would be diluted by the music. After Weill had cemented his place in the American musical theater with his successes of *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*, Rice relented, knowing that his play would inevitably be set to music. Out of all the composers who had approached him, he concluded that Weill would do the most justice to his work (Taylor, 298). Preparations for *Street Scene* began in 1946.

The story takes place in a working-class Manhattan neighborhood in 1946, focusing on the different tenants and their families. Two young neighbors, Rose Maurant and Sam Kaplan have a growing attraction for each other. Rumors circulate through the neighborhood that Rose's mother is having an affair, and tensions surrounding this come to a head in the second act. Rose's father discovers his wife's infidelity and he shoots and kills her. Rose, although she has already promised to run away with Sam, sees the harsh realities of her mother's death as a sign to beware of love, and she runs away without him (Drew, 351).

Weill instantly recognized this work to be the fulfillment of his dream to write an "American opera," and as a result he took over to ensure it would be his envisioned end product (Hirsch, 135). Rice and Weill agreed to bring in Langston Hughes for the libretto. Hughes was a highly controversial literary figure, and he was inexperienced in writing libretti for musical theater, although he had completed one opera libretto for William Grant Still. Hughes was to provide the important American aspect that needed to permeate the show. Weill accompanied Hughes to nightclubs in Harlem to fully understand the cultural scene of working class New York.

Rice proved to be yet another playwright in the long line of Weill's difficult collaborators. He had been guarded for so many years about this particular work, fearing that any change to it would ruin his intent, and was incredibly difficult to persuade to change or omit text from his script. Hughes also put up a significant amount of opposition to the composer. Weill took advantage of the fact that the poet was an inexperienced librettist by going so far as to dictate the kind of libretto he wanted, leaving

little creative leeway. The creation of the show was a difficult process for all three men involved.

Regardless of the altercations between the collaborators, Weill's music was a singular masterpiece, a score comprised of twenty-one musical pieces. Weill and Rice were both adamant about the continuity of the action, creating a plethora of different types of pieces to assure this sequence. Some dialogue was completely performed without music, other sections were underscored, and the rest were arias, duets, ensemble pieces, and dances. Unlike the *Songspiel* style of *Mahagonny*, Weill used a "flowing technique" for the direction of his music, leaning more towards a through-composed style (Hirsch, 63). The music was an outgrowth of the action in such a perfect fashion that the power of the music actually began to overshadow the plot.

Much like in *Where Do We Go From Here?*, Rice's script offered many opportunities for the composer to experiment with an array musical genres through the incorporation of various styles within the score to accentuate the overriding nationalistic undercurrent. Because the story takes place in working class New York, the community included many nationalities. This is exemplified in a sextet that takes place in the first act led by an Italian grocer. The famous 'Ice Cream Sextet' is written in the style of an Italian opera ensemble. Weill also made use of other American musical genres such as soft-shoe jazzy foxtrots and even a jitterbug. His attempt to create blues numbers was amateur at best but was nonetheless American in character (Hirsch, 269). As a tribute to *Porgy and Bess*, Weill opened his show with a humorous jazzy number, "Ain't It Awful the Heat," similar in style and context to that of Gershwin's opening "Summertime."

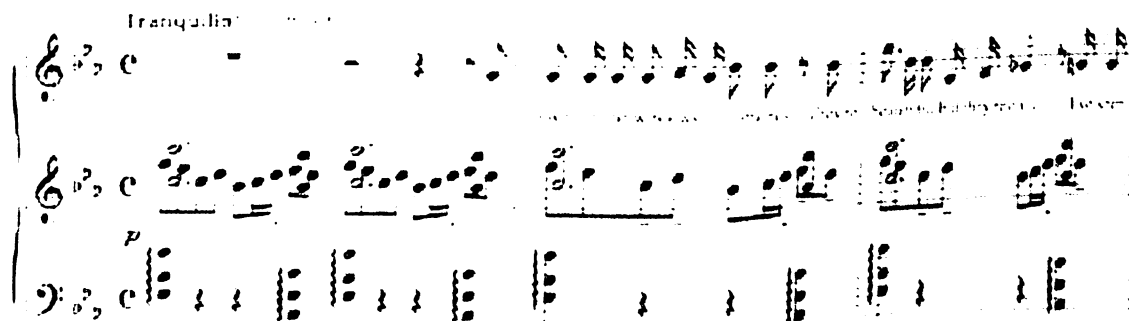
Naturally, he included show-stopping numbers that could easily be separated from the production to be commercialized.

One such show-stopping number, “Wouldn’t You Like to Be on Broadway?” is performed in the first act by Harry Easter, Rose’s sleazy boss as he walks her home from work. He tries to tempt her to run away with him by offering her the glamorous life of an actress. Her response, however, is a gentle decline of his offer, saying that she is waiting for the “right one.” In her torch song, “What Good Would the Moon Be?,” Rose insinuates that the one she wants is her childhood friend, Sam Kaplan.

Weill composed her song in a Broadway-styled foxtrot, vaguely labeling it as a “cavatina” in order to identify its operatic origins. The longing mirrored in Weill’s liberal use of diminished and half-diminished chords is reminiscent of his “September Song” from *Knickerbocker Holiday*. The unresolved sentiment in his chords foreshadows the troubles yet to come in the opera, as well as Rose’s despair that she cannot be with the one she loves. The form of the song closely follows that of an aria by utilizing a recitative section (Figure 15) followed by the aria (Figure 16).

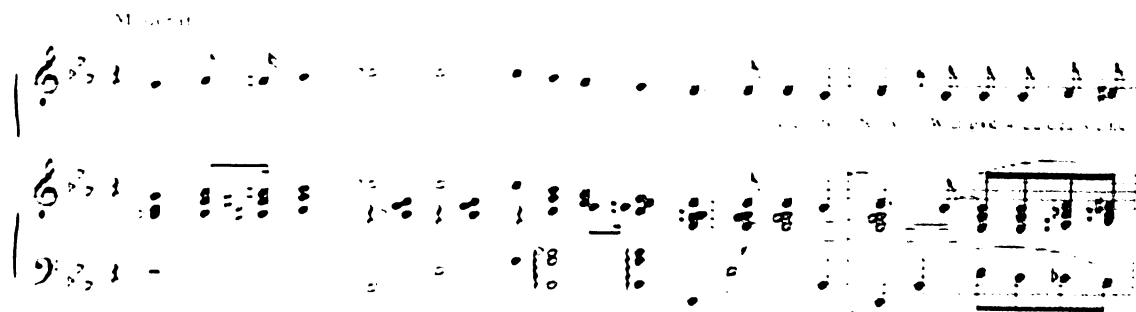
**Figure 15: Recitative of “What good would the moon be?”**

Source: Weill, Kurt, and Langston Hughes. *Street Scene: an American Opera ; Based on Elmer Rice's Play*. Milwaukee, WI: Leonard Publ., 1985.



**Figure 16: Aria of “What good would the moon be?”**

Source: Weill, Kurt, and Langston Hughes. *Street Scene: an American Opera; Based on Elmer Rice's Play*. Milwaukee, WI: Leonard Publ., 1985.



“What Good Would the Moon Be?” was partially intended to be used commercially. The syncopated torch song was ideal for popular music standards. There were several issues, however, with the difficulty of the piece and the broad vocal range used. Such was the massive obstacle standing in the way of truly having a blurred line between musical theater and opera. The styles were blatantly American popular music, but the more difficult tessitura and technical skills required of the operatic composition left performance only open to trained singers.

For all the gains that Weill made with this work, it has remained a production taken on strictly by opera companies rather than musical theatre troupes. The same impediment has infected similar works of other composers, such as Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide*, Arthur Sullivan’s operettas, and, of course, George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*. In 1946, competition on Broadway was fierce, forcing *Street Scene* to share the limelight with instant classics like *Brigadoon*, *Finnian’s Rainbow*, and Rogers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*. The Weill-Rice-Hughes creation received quite a bit of high acclaim, but against the strong competition, it was little more than just a pleasing show. Audiences initially were very large, but dramatically dwindled within the second month of the run.



Although he was disappointed that the show did not stand out more in the face of rivalry, Weill was immensely pleased with his thoroughly American opera. He had succeeded in his own Americanization he whole-heartedly renouncing his German heritage. In 1947, *Life* magazine produced a feature on the composer, calling him a German. Weill quickly wrote to the editor exclaiming,

"I do not consider myself a 'German composer.' The Nazis obviously did not consider me as such, either, and I left their country (an arrangement which suited both me and my rulers admirably) in 1933. I am an American citizen and I have composed exclusively for the American stage" (Hirsch, 274)

His clear disregard for his previous German life, however, was not absent from his music.

Weill continued to include European influences within his compositions.

## CHAPTER XI

### “Come Up From the Fields, Father” from *Four Walt Whitman Songs*

The 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor that sent Americans into war instigated an incredible amount of nationalism. Weill, the ever-eager American, was more than happy to show his patriotism by composing several songs dedicated to the war effort. His compositions consisted mostly of morale-boosting, high spirited pieces that could be easily performed by non-singers, perhaps in hopes that the soldiers themselves would learn and sing his works to liven their mood and take their minds off of the hardship of war, even if for just a moment.

The war also inspired Weill to write poignant art songs specifically designated for classically trained singers. In early 1942, he composed three songs set to the militaristic poetry of Walt Whitman, “Beat! Beat! Drums!,” “Dirge for Two Veterans,” and “Oh Captain! My Captain!.” It was Weill’s hope that African-American concert bass-baritone Paul Robeson would perform these works. Robeson was not only an accomplished concert performer, but he was known for his active role in the Civil Rights Movement. Inspired by him, the composer sent autographed copies of his work to the singer, but a performance by Robeson never materialized. Instead, the American film actress Helen Hayes recorded them for the company Fight for Freedom, Inc. (Farneth, 198). The set was not completed, however, until five years later.

In May 1947, Weill traveled to London, Paris, Geneva, Rome, Cairo, and Palestine, arranging productions of his works abroad. It was the first time he had been back to Europe since he had departed in 1935, and it was the first time to see his parents since 1934 (Farneth, 238). A fourth Whitman piece, 'Come Up From the Fields, Father' was added to the set after he had arrived back home in New York. The full set of four songs was recorded by tenor William Horne in 1947.

"Come Up From the Fields, Father" was unlike any other piece Weill had written in America. Perhaps his return to opera with *Street Scene* had instigated a rejuvenation of his former academic Busoni music, at least for this particular set – he had also begun working on the musical *Love Life* with Alan Jay Lerner in July, clearly not indicative of the psychologically elite music of his early German career. The set was written originally for men to perform because of the militaristic subject matter. "Come Up From the Fields, Father," however, has a distinct feminine quality that in all actuality is more meaningful when performed by a woman.

Whitman's text is about a rural family who discovers through a letter that their only son has been mortally wounded in battle. Once it becomes known that the soldier has been killed, the poet devotes a great deal of the text to describing the pain felt specifically by the mother and how she longs to follow her son into death. In order to properly accentuate the swift changes in mood that occur throughout the work, the music is structured in several distinct sections, each changing with every new strophe.

Weill opens the piece with an agitated falling and rising tripleted arch, painting the scene to be frightful and exciting. The family has just received a letter, sure that it is from the son, Pete. Suddenly, Whitman and, consequently, Weill shifts into an

unexpected description of the peacefulness of autumn on the farm (Figure 17). He gently rocks into a mixed meter, comforting the listener into falsely believing that there is nothing amiss.

**Figure 17: Autumn peacefulness in “Come Up From the Fields, Father”**

Source: Weill, Kurt *Four Walt Whitman Songs For Voice and Piano*. New York: European American Music, 1956.



The opening disquieting triplet figure returns with no warning, throwing the song back to the matter of the letter. Whitman's inclusion of the calm, sweetly nostalgic section shows the irony of beauty during wartime. He also sets the tone for bitterly describing how war can destroy what is beautiful.

As the mother prepares to read the letter, a state of trepidation and anxiety falls into the music, described in an ostinato treble line of repeated eighth notes, punctuated by a bass motive clearly indicating her distress when realizing that it is not her son who writes. The ostinato flies up in chromatic succession, placing her fears both higher in the sense of mood and musical range as she reads the letter. As she finishes, the bass line

adds chromatic sixteenth note waves to the tripleted eighth note treble line, and both come to a halt on the first whole note of the piece. Weill chose to cut a portion of the text that would fit in at this point. The stop not only prepares the listener for the upcoming change in text, but perhaps is also indicating the change in character as well as in time.

Curiously, the music leaves the erratic mood of the previously described section and returns to a musical form similar to that of the even earlier section that describes the beauty of the fields. By so doing, he emphasizes that the war has encroached upon the little family and their happy world. Once it is clear that “the only son is dead,” the ostinato pattern of repeated eighth notes comes back gently at a moderate tempo as a single melody, leading into the descriptions of the mother. A *poco accelerando* begins, pushing her over the edge of depression into full-blown irreversible despair. Another metrical change launches the singer into falling lines, once again orchestrated by descending ostinato voiced by the piano and followed by the fall of the vocal line itself. Whitman’s final line “to be with her dear dead son” instigates Weill’s return to a beautiful and uncharacteristically diatonic piano melody, emphasizing the composer’s favorite compositional tool of irony.

The angular vocal melody and unexpected chromaticism show Weill’s “Come Up From the Fields, Father” as one of his most Stravinsky-inspired American works. His compositional ability to write in this style is both undeniable and moving. The passion and emotional distress indicated by the fusion of Whitman’s poetry and Weill’s musical setting proved he continued to have a fondness for a psychologically intensive musical style, regardless of his interests in Broadway and Hollywood. This renewal of his interest

in cerebral music created a full circle for Weill's compositional life, just three years before his untimely death in 1950.

## Conclusion

Kurt Weill was not the only German-born composer to struggle under the pressure of the National Socialism. He was also not the only composer to flee to Paris and then to New York. Weill was one of many immigrants escaping the terror that was taking over Europe. He is set apart from the rest, however, by his ability to survive in every new situation by the process of musical adaptation. Weill is one of the few composers that could maintain a certain popularity while also being inventive and experimental in his musical style. Success acted as a driving force for the composer; he knew that the message in his *Gebrauchsmusik* would not reach the masses if the music did not enjoy popularity. Therefore he tweaked his compositional style to suit his surroundings, and he cut his losses when he had a flop, no matter how painful it was for him to do so.

The research I conducted included two specific events that drastically affected my perspective on Kurt Weill's music. In January of 2011, I traveled to Germany and France to visit some of the most important European landmarks associated with the composer. I saw Berlin, the city in which Weill began his mature career, and I visited a few of the theaters that saw the premiers of pivotal works, including the Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm (now home of the Berliner Ensemble, the group established by Brecht). Although it was difficult to estimate the character of the society that had functioned during the Weimar Republic, especially after much of it was wiped away by the effects of

World War II, the bustle of the city that influenced Weill was still very much present. I traveled southwest to Dessau, the town in which Weill was born and lived the first eighteen years of his life. This city, though small and now exceptionally industrial, proved to be the most educational stop on my European tour. I walked the streets Weill walked between his home and the city center and I stood in awe of the larger-than-life statues of Brecht and Weill at the corner of Bertolt-Brecht Straße and Kurt-Weill Straße. None of this compares to the Kurt Weill Zentrum. The Zentrum functions as the German Kurt Weill head office, housing countless documents, manuscripts, and general information about the great composer. Because it was under reconstruction at the time of my visit, I was given a private meeting with the staff and librarian, allowing me to look through the work that had been boxed up and put in storage. To be able to ask questions and discuss the works of Weill with historians who specialized in his music was an incredible experience. I also had the chance to see Paris and the theaters in which his French works premiered. Unlike Berlin, the style and culture of the city seemed to be much like the way Weill's music describes it. It is clear how Weill could easily embrace the cabaret music that surrounds Parisian atmosphere. It is also clear, however, how he was unable to stay. There was no call for his theatrical Weimar music there, no matter how much he tried to disguise it.

Another outside influence on my studies of Weill's music was my performance. On March 3, 2011, I gave my hour-long Senior Voice Recital in partial fulfillment of my degree in music, the second half of which was dedicated to the music of Kurt Weill. Research can only go so far in the spheres of performance before it must be presented on stage, and music is no exception. Preparing the music I researched was a slightly new



process for me because I already knew the background of each piece, I hand selected each of the seven works I was to perform, and I was thoroughly invested in the music.

Weill's music brings an unusual challenge to classically trained singers. As his compositional style varied throughout his career, so did the style of voice he required for his music. Some songs, such as in his earlier Brecht works, needed the sound of the average person or actors who could sing. Others, like in his French stint, are cabaret in style and must be sung with a jazzy lilt. His American musical numbers were to be performed just like any other musical at the time, but he also wrote concert arias and art songs for trained singers. No one performer, except perhaps his beloved Lotte Lenya, would be able to sing all genres to the taste of the composer, and I have no desire to disagree with this fact. Therefore, as a classically-trained singer I decided to approach learning my music with the best technique I could have without destroying the intention of the style. The middle ground between operatic vocal production, musical theater brightness, cabaret singing, and half-singing/half-speaking technique is a very small grey area. I opted to maintain the good vocal technique that comes with training as a basis for my singing and added slight alterations to infer the style of song rather than change the vocal production completely. After all, it was in preparation for my vocal recital, an important component of my degree. Singing without good technique would be less demonstrative of Weill's stylistic choices and more characteristic of poor technique.

The actual performance served as a welcome capstone to my intensive preparation that comes with such a recital as well to give me feedback from a modern-day audience about the popularity of Weill's work. Many of his pieces are still performed frequently and *Die Dreigroschenoper* (translated into English for an American audience as

*Threepenny Opera*) is well known in musical academic circles. However, many musical history classes and music literature classes tend to look at the composer as an optional subject in a classroom rather than an important figure dooming many of his brilliantly creative works to obscurity. They are attracted to his work in cabaret, but his earlier works, such as *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *Der Silbersee*, and *Neid*, are virtually unknown to many musicians. Following my recital, however, I was pleased to hear great excitement about my Weill pieces, and since then, several students have asked me for recommendations on which Weill work they themselves should perform. I am exceedingly proud of my work not only because it has granted me the chance to sing and perform the music of such a creative composer, but because I have shared my excitement and passion of Weill with other musicians.

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