



drama and music at bennington present

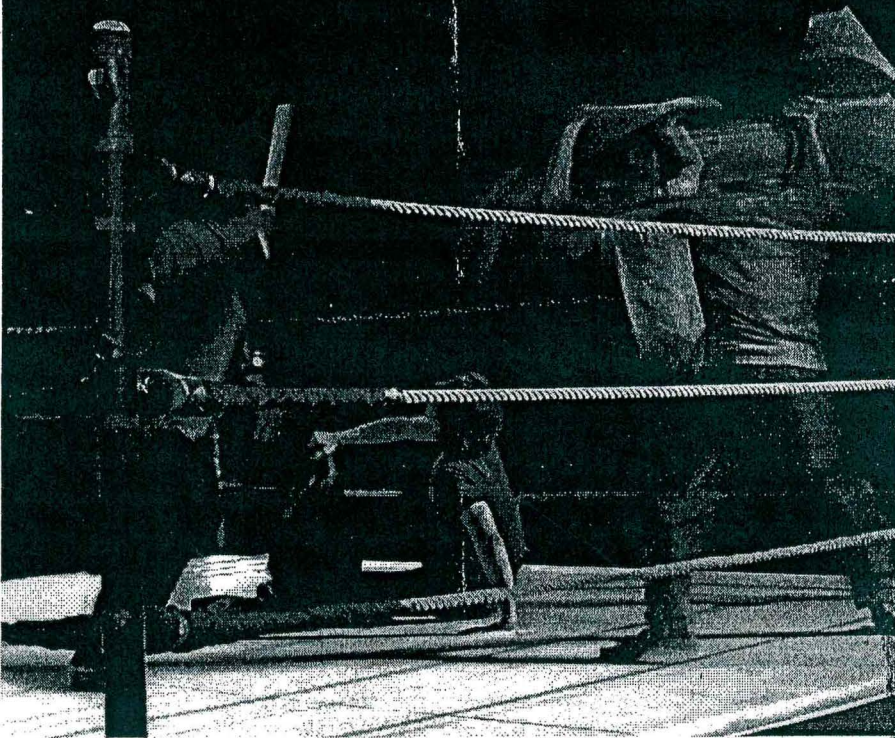
MAHAGONNY

SONGSPIEL

WORDS BY BERTOLT BRECHT, MUSIC BY KURT WEILL

DIRECTED BY JEAN RANDICH

may 7, friday --- may 8, saturday --- may 9, sunday
lester martin theater / spring 2010



MAHAGONNY SONG LYRICS

In compiling English versions of the lyrics for this program, we referred to the work of the following Brecht translators: W. H. Auden, Eric Bentley, Michael Feingold, and Ralph Mannheim. The Alabama Song (Nr. 2) and Benares Song (Nr.4), originally written in broken English, are not included below.

1. Off to Mahagonny!

Off to Mahagonny
The air is cool and fresh
There's horse flesh there and
whore's flesh too
Whiskey and poker games

Gorgeous green
Moon of Alabama
Light the way
Underneath our shirts today
We've got cash with which to pay
For a great big grin
From your big stupid mouth.

Off to Mahagonny
The wind is in the east
Raw meat for sale on every street
And no bureaucracy

Gorgeous green
Moon of Alabama
Light the way
Underneath our shirts today
We've got cash with which to pay
For a great big grin
From your big stupid mouth.

Off to Mahagonny
The sails are blowing wide
The syph-syph-shyp-syph-civilized
Will soon be purified.

'Cause only skins bring in the
dollars.

To stay in Mahagonny
You'd need about five bucks a
day
But if you liked to party
You'd need a little extra.

Back then they all hung out
In Mahagonny's Poker-Drink
salon.
They lost every hand
But they got off on it!

On the sea
And on land
That's why the consumption of
fresh skins
Is enormous.
But when it bites you in the ass,
Who will come up with the cash?
For the skins are cheap
But the whiskey is expensive.

To stay in Mahagonny
You'd need about five bucks a
day
But if you liked to party
You'd need a little extra.

Back then they all hung out
In Mahagonny's Poker-Drink
salon.

Moon of Alabama
Light the way
Underneath our shirts today
We've got cash with which to pay
For a great big grin
From your big stupid mouth.

3. Life in Mahagonny

To stay in Mahagonny
You'd need about five bucks a day
But if you liked to party
You'd need a little extra.

Back then they all hung out
In Mahagonny's Poker-Drink salon.
They lost every hand
But they got off on it!

On the sea
And on land
Everyone gets skinned
So they sit around and sell their
skins

But they got off on it!

On the sea
And on land
You see the mills of God
Almighty grinding
That's why many people sit here
Selling many people's skins here
For they like to call the tune
But do not like to pay the piper.

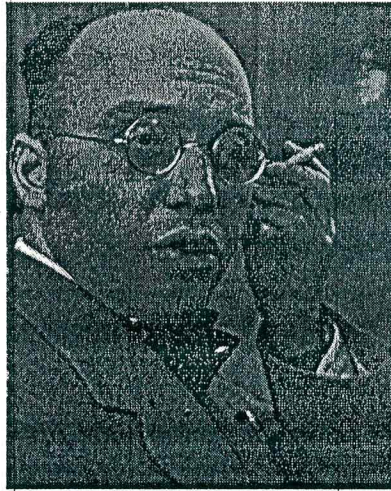
If you hole up in your house
You don't need five bucks a day
And if you're not without a
spouse
Perhaps you won't need that bit
extra.

But today they all are sitting
In the Dear Lord's cheap salon.
They win every time
But they get nothing out of it!

SYNOPSIS

(from the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music)

The songs, considered in order, tell a skeletal story similar to that of the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. As renowned Weill scholar David Drew writes, "The fleshpots of Mahagonny attract many visitors, but prove disappointing and expensive; God orders the inhabitants to hell, but they revolt, claiming they are there already" (Kurt Weill: A Handbook (U. of California Press, 1987), p. 171).



Weill, 1935

KURT WEILL (1900-1950) Born in Germany, came to the US in 1935. Composer of the *Threepenny Opera*, *Mahagonny*, *Lady in the Dark*, *Street Scene* and many other innovative works for the theater. His extensive list of works also includes well-known songs and instrumental music, preserved on innumerable recordings. One of the most versatile and influential theater composers of the twentieth century.

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DRAMATURGE'S NOTE

The tumultuous Weimar era of the early twentieth century, born from the atrocities of WWI, has come to represent the struggle for stability in the midst of economic and social crisis. Despite its every hardship, this era saw an astonishing outpouring of creativity in every conceivable artistic medium- from painting and music, to architecture and literature. Piscator and the German expressionists certainly did their part to bring modernity to the theatre, but traditional, melodramatic operas and plays still constituted the more popular fare of the time. Meanwhile, Bertolt Brecht's vision was to reaffirm theatre as an art form that transcended mere entertainment.

Brecht completely rejected the concept of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a production in which the individual elements of a performance (music, text, dance, etc.) harmoniously synthesize to form a "total art work." Brecht regarded this kind of theatre as vapid, saccharine, and tantamount to emotional masturbation. By distancing the audience from the performance and preventing them from forming empathetic attachments to characters, Brecht urges his audience to think critically and relate what is seen onstage to their own lives.

Mahagonny Songspiel functions just this way. The first of several, notable collaborations between Brecht and the composer Kurt Weill, *Mahagonny* employs a juxtaposition of highbrow and lowbrow elements to obliterate our preconceptions of dramatic and operatic performance. Weill's music combines sophisticated classical composition with the gritty, soulful style of American jazz and German cabaret songs. There is no conventional plot line and no defined characters with whom we can sympathize. Such distancing effects serve to allow Brecht's philosophical message about society come across as clearly and as brutally as possible. *Mahagonny* is a parable about the destructive power of capitalism in which prosperity and possibility give way to ferocious and unbridled greed. And although this songspiel is very much a product of the 1920's, Brecht easily could have been writing about American culture today and the imminent collapse it is currently facing. The third song *Wer in Mahagonny blieb*

scrutinizing the Red Shirts in Thailand and the Black Shirts in Athens. We began to discover how to tap into the impulses of these gestures in our bodies. We had fun physicalizing the action in a way that Weill would say "excludes all doubt and misunderstanding about the incident in question."

More than anything, it has been thrilling, liberating, and fun. I'd like to thank everyone in the Mahagonny cast, orchestra, creative team, crew, and you, the audience, for going to Mahagonny with us.

In closing, here is Brecht interviewing Brecht on Mahagonny:

Why is Mahagonny an opera? Because its basic attitude is that of an opera: that is to say, culinary.

Does Mahagonny adopt a hedonistic approach? It does.

Is Mahagonny an experience? It is an experience.

For ...Mahagonny is a piece of fun.

Have fun! Think about it. Ask why.

Jean Randich

May 2010

CAST

Jessie	Amelia Meath
Bessie	Eliza McKelway
Charlie	Danny Brylow
Billy	Carl Johansen
Bobby	Josh Gulotta
Jimmy	George James

stagehands

Diaz	Alex Diaz
Glickman	Dmitri Glickman
Hippensteel	Maya Hippensteel
Johnson	Laurel Johnson

CREATIVE TEAM

Direction	Jean Randich
Music Direction	John Eagle
Conductor	Tom Bergeron
Instrumental	Tom Bogdan
& Vocal Preparation	
Set & Video Design	Sue Rees

Lighting Design	Michael Chybowski
Costume Design	Emily Woods Hogue
Sound Design	Julian Chapman
	Leigh Needham
Fight Consultant	Christopher Edwards
Dramaturge	Katie Kierstead
Technical Director	Michael Rancourt
Master Electrician	Robert Post
Music Technician	Dan Roninson
Stage Manager	Olivia Murphy
Assistant Director	Jon Burklund
Assistant Costume Designer	Alex Cassanos
Assistant Light Designer	Webster Marsh

ORCHESTRA

Instrumental Preparation	Tom Bergeron
Piano	John Eagle
Violin	Emily Call
	Emma Piazza
Clarinet	Simone Adler
Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Alto Sax	Kim Nucci
Alto Sax	Stephen Piccarella
Trumpet	Keenan Walsh
	Amitai Gross
Trombone	Jessie Miglus
Percussion	Conner Dolson
	Peter Reale

PRE-SHOW BAND

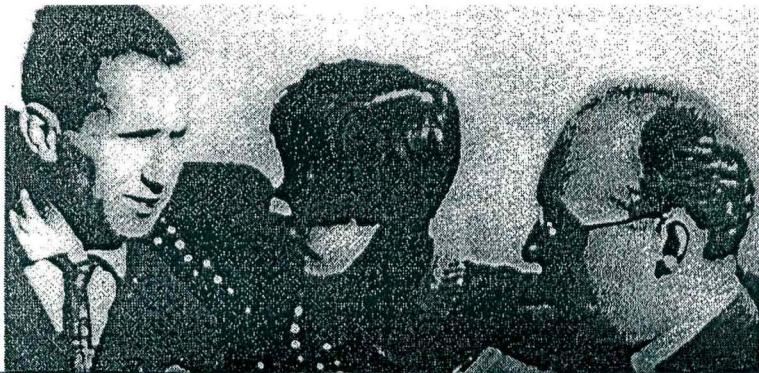
Atticus Lazenby - Piano and Tenor Saxophone, Ben Broderick Phillips - Bass, Ben Howe - Drums

SPECIAL THANKS

All involved in this production would like to thank the drama and music faculty, Suzanne Jones, Linda Hurley, Bruce Williamson, Nick Brooke, Dana Reitz, Theo Koppel, Mass Moca, The President's Office, Yoshiko Sato and Kanako Seki. We couldn't have done it without you.

ELECTRICS CREW

Ilana Stuelpner, Alex Doyle, Betsy Rupp, Aisha Cruse, David Brinkman, Webster Marsh, Jessie Miglus, Jordan Kaplan



and Weill, ca 1928



Brecht, Lenye

WARDROBE CREW

Farhad Mirza, Chelsea Bernard, Allie Mandel-Lees, Connie Panzariello

RUN CREW

Light board operator: Amanda Buckley
Projector operators: Jonah Lipsky and Kristen Gremillion
Follow Spot Operators: Sage Savage and Nina Swistel

SCENE SHOP

Regular Scene Shop Workers

Jon Burklund, Corina Dalzell, Isabella Hreljanovic, Jonah Lipsky
Carl Johanson, Brandon LaDue, Ezra Lowrey, Katy Nelson,
Grady O'Neil, Emily Reid

Scene Shop Lab Crew

Catherine Weingarten, Farhad Mirza, Andrew Fridae, Eugene Kim,
Amanda Campbell, Kelly Ward, Abigail Walzer, Corey Mandel,
Laurel Johnson, Anna Green

COSTUME SHOP STAFF

Special thanks to Terry Teitelbaum, Mimi Bain, Madison Best,
Megan Diehl, Emily Krug, Sierra Marcum, Devan Marques,
Jama McMahon, Jessie Miglus, Kaitee Tredway, Emily Woods Hogue

LAB CREW

Chelsea Bernard, Farhad Mirza, Connie Panzariello, Allie Lees,
Forest Purnell

MAKE-UP

Mimi Bain and Erica Baffa

5. God in Mahagonny

MEN:

One morning when the sky was
grey
During the whiskey
God came to Mahagonny
God came to Mahagonny.
During the whiskey
We recognized God in Mahagonny.

GOD:

Insatiable sponges
Lapping up my harvest year by
year!
Little have you reckoned with your
Maker!
Are you ready now when I appear?

WOMEN:

Saw what they were, the people
of Mahagonny:
Yes, answered the people of
Mahagonny.

MEN:

One morning when the sky was
grey
During the whiskey

WOMEN:

Saw what they were, the
people of Mahagonny:
Yes, answered the people of
Mahagonny.

MEN:

One morning when the sky was
grey
During the whiskey



God came to Mahagonny.
 During the whiskey
 We recognized God in Mahagonny.

GOD:
 Did you laugh on Friday evening?
 I saw Mary Weeman swimming by
 Like a salted cod-fish in the salt
 sea:
 Mary never will again be dry!

WOMEN:
 Saw what they were, the people
 of Mahagonny:
 Yes, answered the people of
 Mahagonny.

MEN:
 One morning when the sky was
 grey
 During the whiskey
 God came to Mahagonny
 God came to Mahagonny.
 During the whiskey
 We recognized God in Mahagonny.

GOD:
 Whose is this ammunition?
 Shot her, did you, shot my
 deaconess?
 Are my thrones for brutes of your
 condition?
 Is it drunken loafers I must bless?

WOMEN:
 Saw what they were, the people
 of Mahagonny:
 Yes, answered the people of
 Mahagonny.

GOD:
 Down with all into hell-fire!

Stuff your Henry Clays into your
 pack!
 Off with all of you to Hell, you
 scoundrels!
 Wriggle in the Devil's crowded
 sack!

You came to Mahagonny
 You came to Mahagonny.
 During the whiskey
 Got going in Mahagonny.

We won't budge a foot now!
 We'll go on strike! We will
 never
 Let you drag us off to Hell
 forever
 For, we are in Hell and always
 have been.

JESSIE:
 They looked at God, the people
 of Mahagonny:
 No, answered the people of
 Mahagonny!

ALL:
 Saw what they were, the
 people of Mahagonny:
 No, answered the people of
 Mahagonny!

6. Finale

People only dream of
 Mahagonny
 Because the world is so
 rotten;
 There is no peace in us—
 No unity—
 And there is nothing
 one can depend on.

But Mahagonny
 Doesn't exist;
 For Mahagonny
 Never occurred.
 For Mahagonny
 Is only a made-up word.

tells an all-too familiar tale of the high cost of living. "Everyone gets skinned, so they sell their skins for dollars." People are being consumed; humanity itself loses all value. "The skins are cheap but the whiskey is expensive." Brecht paints the pursuit of money as a card game in which participants lose every hand but "get off on it." Brecht's depiction of capitalism is a grim one, to be sure, but its relevance to our current economic crisis is uncanny. Furthermore, it is disheartening to observe that Western culture seems to have progressed so little from Brecht's time. Brecht ardently believed in the power of art to teach people to think critically and to incite them to action, but his efforts have done nothing to prevent history from repeating itself. Does that mean, therefore, that Brecht's work is a failure, or that to continue performing this kind of theatre is a waste of time?

Of course not. The most important thing we should take away from *Mahagonny* is that the power to change the world lies in our own hands. Too often we forget this. The "joke" at the end of the *songspiel* that "Mahagonny is only a made-up word" is as much a metatheatrical jab as a reminder that capitalism is just another social construction that we ourselves invented. We created it and we bear the responsibility for changing it. If we can only acknowledge this fact and motivate ourselves to act, we can stop the self-destruction of society in its tracks. Brecht and Weill present us with this choice: Do we break the cycle of violence, greed, and exploitation, or allow it to break us- again?

Mahagonny is a wake-up call and an invitation to revolution. Make

Katie Kierstead

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Steven Bach, beloved professor and mentor.

DRAMA FACULTY AND STAFF

Michael Chybowski, Michael Giannitti, Linda Hurley, Kirk Jackson, Dina Janis, Sherry Kramer, Daniel Michaelson, Robert Post, Michael Rancourt, Jean Randich, Sue Rees, Jenny Rohn, Terry Teitelbaum

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