

## UW Opera turns to music & theater of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with A KURT WEILL CABARET

This fall, University Opera takes a short break from strictly operatic offerings as it turns to the music of Kurt Weill (1900-1950). A KURT WEILL CABARET, a pastiche of 21 solos and ensembles from Weill's many diverse works, will be presented at the Music Hall on the UW-Madison campus on October 27 at 7:30pm, October 29 at 3:00pm and October 31 at 7:30pm. David Ronis, Director of University Opera, will direct and interim Director of Orchestras, Chad Hutchinson, will conduct. Musical preparation will be by UW-Madison vocal coach, Daniel Fung.

Born in Germany, Weill achieved early fame through works created in partnership with the playwright Berthold Brecht, most notably, *Die Dreigroschen Oper (The Threepenny Opera)* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny (Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny)*. Forced into exile by the rise of Hitler in 1933, Weill spent a few years in Paris before eventually moving to New York. In the United States, he found success on Broadway through collaborations with such lyricists as Ira Gershwin, Langston Hughes, and Ogden Nash on such shows as *Lady in the Dark*, *One Touch of Venus*, and the opera *Street Scene*. Several roles in these productions were premiered by his wife, Lotte Lenya, the singing actress who championed his works even after their divorce and his death.

A KURT WEILL CABARET is a unique production, put together by Ronis, that contains no one dramatic through-line. Instead, the pieces that comprise the evening, taken out of their usual context, are juxtaposed so as to create multiple mini-narratives. There are no set characters; relationships develop and dissolve as the evening progresses. The show is organized into three sections, each highlighting themes of Weill's oeuvre. The first of these works its way through a series of dysfunctional yet comic relationships between men and women. The metaphor of travel underscores the second section, which explores themes of longing, disappointment, and finally hope. The characters involved are tough and world weary – their hopes and aspirations often dashed by swift doses of reality. Nevertheless, there is a sense that all is not lost and redemption is possible. The third and final portion of the show returns to lighter fare that affirms that true love and happiness is possible, especially when there's ice cream involved!

### TALK-BACK

Following each performance of A KURT WEILL CABARET, audience members will be given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the performance during talk-back sessions with the cast and members of the artistic staff.

The musical numbers of A KURT WEILL CABARET, sung in English, German, and French, include "The Saga of Jenny," "Surabaya Johnny," "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," "Whiskey Bar/Alabama Song," "J'attends un navire," "Foolish Heart," "Youkali," "Denn wie man sich bettet," "A Rhyme for Angela," "It Never Was You," and "My Ship."

The cast features twelve UW-Madison students and one guest artist: Alec Brown, Matthew Chastain, Jake Elfner, Tim Emery, Talia Engstrom, Eliav Goldman, Courtney Kayser, Sarah Kendall, Miranda Kettlewell, Jeffrey Larson, Lauren Shafer, Emily Vandenberg, and Emily Weaver.

The production will be designed by Greg Silver with lighting by Aimee Hanyzewski. Sydney Krieger and Hyewon Park will be the costume designers, Laura Meinders the props designer, and the production stage manager will be Shelly Sarauer. Others on the production staff include Thomas Kasdorf, rehearsal pianist; Courtney Kayser, operations manager for University Opera; and Ethan White, lighting board operator.

### TICKETS & SHOWTIMES

Tickets are \$25.00 for the general public, \$20.00 for senior citizens and \$10.00 for UW-Madison students, available in advance through the Campus Arts Ticketing office at (608) 265-ARTS and online at <http://www.arts.wisc.edu/> (click "box office"). Tickets may also be purchased in person at the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office Monday - Friday, 10:00 am to 7:00 p.m. and Saturdays, 11:30 am - 2:30 p.m. and the Vilas Hall Box Office, Monday-Friday, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Because shows often sell out, advance purchase is recommended. If unsold tickets remain, they may be purchased at the door beginning one hour before the performance. The Carol Rennebohm Auditorium is located in Music Hall, at the foot of Bascom Hill on Park Street.

University Opera is a cultural service of the School of Music at the University of Wisconsin-Madison whose mission is to provide comprehensive operatic training and performance opportunities for our students and operatic programming to the community. For more information, please contact [opera@music.wisc.edu](mailto:opera@music.wisc.edu). Or visit the School of Music's web site at [music.wisc.edu](http://music.wisc.edu).

## VIEWPOINT: A Composer's Perspective by Jeff Gibbens

**Kurt Weill: Opera by any means necessary.** Writing about Benjamin Britten in connection with the spring production of *The Turn of the Screw*, I was trying to think of an American contemporary who made a parallel contribution to opera in English, and the name that came to mind was Kurt Weill. Why?

Weill, an unusually gifted composer who decided to devote himself to theater in his early twenties, was an American ultimately by choice. Having mastered existing forms of musical theater in Europe, Weill immigrated to the United States and proceeded to reinvent theatrical forms here. His American output includes pageants, incidental music for films and a film musical, songs and incidental music for radio, opera for schools, and incidental music, songs, operetta, full-length plays with music, and opera for the Broadway stage. Weill did not just master English text setting—working from the model of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, which he heard in rehearsal shortly after his arrival in New York, Weill mastered the art of composing American popular songs. Weill will be remembered, if for nothing else, as the creator of standards, sung or spoken, by jazz singers, folk singers, theatrical singers, opera singers, and rockers. And yet, Weill composed two significant symphonies, and his works, especially from the European years, feature startlingly modern writing for the classical orchestra (note the interludes in *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*). This contradiction came about through a pragmatic approach to musical style, pioneered early in the European phase of Weill's career with the *Mahagonny-Songspiel*.

Weill rejected categorically the Wagner model of music drama, with a continuous orchestral texture that buoys up and comments on the text and the stage action, in favor of "epic" presentation. Like *opera seria*, epic musical theater uses closed musical forms or numbers; the characters represent universal types and attitudes, rather than individuals with whom the spectator is invited to identify. The spectators' emotions are engaged as they process the meaning of the text

and stage action, not by the passions of the characters. Text, drama, music, and stage setting compete for the audience's attention. The experience is a fractured *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Unlike *opera seria*,

Weill's characters are not idealized heroes, monarchs, or deities (with the hilarious exception of Venus), but children, poor people, workers, beat cops, lowlifes, or criminals. Even when he depicted the Manhattan elite in his 1940s musicals *Lady in the Dark* and *One touch of Venus*, he made a distinction between their world and "the carefree kingdom of the wealthy." Writing of *The beggar's opera* (Gay/Pepusch, the prototype for *Threepenny Opera*) Weill said it did more good than "all the dramas of 'noble souls'...by showing with biting humor what the world would be like if it were inhabited by crooks and hypocrits[!]" What is hard to understand about Weill's work is how musical style is not an end in itself, but a tool in the layering of meaning to address contemporary social issues. In this regard Weill is like one of the most American of composers, Charles Ives, unfortunately not a theater composer.



Mary Martin as Venus, 1943

**Lotte Lenya.** Weill enjoyed a personal and professional partnership with Lenya from the mid-'20s to his death in 1950. Trained as a dancer and actress, Lenya was not a trained singer nor could read music, but had the ability to sing Weill's music both accurately and with an uncanny level of intensity, and did so into her 70s. There are many fine examples of her work readily available, for example her recording of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, which may be compared to a couple of dozen others by more conventional singers. It is ironic that it is her framing of numbers like *Pirate Jenny* which encourages the stand-alone performance of Weill excerpts, whereas Weill spent the bulk of his career composing theatrical works of evening length.



Weill and Lenya after World War II



Mack the Knife, from the 1931 film of *Threepenny Opera*

**Fall 2017  
Vocal Events**

**October 15**, 7:30 pm (Mills)  
UW Choral Collage. Free.

**October 18**, 4:30-6:00 pm  
(Morphy Hall) Birgül Su Arıç  
and Mehmet Aric: Master Class.  
Free and open to the public

**October 19**, 7 pm (Morphy  
Hall) Birgül Su Arıç and  
Mehmet Aric, Concert.

**November 10**, 8:00 pm (Mills)  
UW Concert Choir. Free.

**November 10**, 8:00 pm,  
**November 11**, 7:00 pm  
(Overture Center) Wisconsin  
Singers 50th Anniversary  
Concerts.

**November 12**, 3:00 pm (Mills)  
Women's Chorus, University  
Chorus and Master Singers  
Combined Choirs Concert. Free.

**November 14**, 7:30 pm (Music  
Hall) Opera Scenes Workshop.  
Free.

**November 17**, 8:00 pm (Mills)  
Madrigal Singers. Free.

**November 18**, 8:00 pm (Mills)  
Chorale. Free.

**December 3**, 2:00 pm and 4:00  
pm (Luther Memorial Church)  
Winter Choral Concerts,  
Beverly Taylor, conductor. Free.

**December 9**, 8:00 pm,  
**December 10**, 7:00 pm (Mills)  
Choral Union & Symphony  
Orchestra presenting Mozart's  
Great C Minor Mass and  
Brahms' *Schicksalslied*. Beverly  
Taylor, conductor. Tickets: \$15  
adults/\$8 all students.

**January 28, 2018**, 3:00 pm  
(Mills) Schubertiade with  
Martha Fischer & Bill Lutes.  
Tickets: \$15 adults/\$5 non-SOM  
students.

**A Dining Idea for Friday, October 27, Opening Night for *A Kurt Weill Cabaret***

Please join us and other opera enthusiasts for a pre-performance dinner in the newly-renovated Memorial Union quarters!

**5:00-5:30 pm Fellowship**

Cash bar that includes all top-self liquors for mixed drinks, a variety of bottled beers, house wine and soda.

**5:30-7:00 pm The Delizioso Buffet Dinner**

Caesar salad, Antipasti board  
Potato gnocchi, Italian sausage, basil marinara  
Cheese ravioli, tomato vodka sauce  
Italian vegetable, toasted garlic bread  
Coffee

**Dessert:** Chocolate Layer Cake

\* The chef will accommodate specific dietary restrictions so please let us know in advance.

**This meal is \$38 inclusive (there are no additional tip/tax fees).** Guests assume all charges for drinks at the cash bar.

The Memorial Union is located at 800 Langdon Street. We can all take a short walk to Music Hall after dinner where *A Kurt Weill Cabaret* will be performed at 7:30 pm.

Please send your list of dinner partners, your contact information and a check for your group (\$38 per person). Checks should be payable to "UW Opera Props," and **please mail before Oct. 18th** to Kristine Bengtson, 1753 Camelot Drive, Madison, WI 53705. (You can also email your reservation info and let me know your check is coming by Oct. 19th at midnight.)

**Questions?** Call Kristine at 608-225-1646 or write [UWOperaProps@gmail.com](mailto:UWOperaProps@gmail.com).

**Dear Opera Props,**

"Thank you so much for your generous donation of the Opera Props Award. Music is my passion, so I appreciate your help as I continue to study it. I had never done opera before going to college, but I am so glad I decided to start. Full-blown, my enjoyment of this experience has been and I am even more grateful that I started my freshman year so that I may continue it for three more years. Your contribution will greatly assist me in doing that and it will further help me keep music in my life as I study music education at UW Madison. Thanks again."

Meghan Stecker

**Join fellow Madison music-lovers on trips to Chicago**

For information on Madison Opera Trips or to place an order, contact Fern Lawrence: (608) 238-1529 or [fernlawrence@hotmail.com](mailto:fernlawrence@hotmail.com).

***Orphée et Eurydice* | Gluck** — Wednesday, September 27, 2017 - 7:30 p.m.

***Turandot* | Puccini** — Wednesday, January 17, 2018 - 2:00 p.m.

***I Puritani* | Bellini** — Thursday, February 13, 2018 - 7:30 p.m.

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## UW Opera Props Award Recipients

In May 2017, the University of Wisconsin Opera Props gave \$8,000 to the UW-Madison Mead Witter School of Music as its annual contribution for awards. The opera director selects Opera Props Award recipients in consultation with the voice faculty. This collaborative planning to determine the best way to support students is a complex process that entails both recruitment of prospective students and recognition, encouragement, and financial aid to our current students. Professor Mimmi Fulmer says that the Opera Props Awards are and have always been a deeply valued tool in this process. Opera Props funding comes from membership donations and other contributions. The following students received awards at the School of Music award ceremony in May.

**Madelaine Trewin**, a soprano, graduated from New London, WI High School and is majoring in Music Education. She has been performing since she was three years old. Some of her more recent roles have been Erzulie in *Once on this Island*; Ms. Hannigan in *Annie*; and Natalie in *All Shook Up*. She was in the chorus of last fall's UW-Madison production of *Falstaff* and has also been a costume shop assistant for academic years 2016-17 and 2017-18. This year, she will be in the University Theatre production of *Our Town* and the University Opera production of *La Bohème*. After graduation, Madelaine hopes to spend time performing with a traveling opera. Once her performing career is finished, she hopes to open a private theater, piano and voice studio, where she would like to teach children of all ages and backgrounds.

Lyric mezzo-soprano **Courtney Kayser** hails from Anamosa, IA and did her undergraduate work at Iowa State University. She is working on a Master's degree in Vocal Performance. Madison audiences have seen her as Meg Page in *Falstaff* with UW Opera; Hansel in scenes from *Hansel and Gretel* with Fresco Opera, and Romeo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* with UW Opera Workshop Scenes. She will be featured in *A Kurt Weill Cabaret* and also serves as the Opera teaching assistant for 2017-18. Courtney looks forward to a career as a full time professional singer and performer in both opera and musical theatre.

**Meg Huskin**, whose home town is Mequon, WI, graduated from Homestead High School. At UW she majored in English and Music, with a concentration on voice and composition. She performed with University Opera, both in Opera Workshop Scenes and as a chorus member in the operas. She was Assistant Director for the 2017 production of *The Turn of the Screw*. Over summer she performed with Harrower Summer Opera in Atlanta in Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. She intends to continue in opera, especially contemporary opera and wants to develop her composition and directing skills to create new works. She is currently an intern with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

**Meghan Stecker** graduated from Kimberly High School in 2016. She is currently a second year undergraduate student at UW-Madison, a soprano majoring in Music Education. As the stage manager for *The Turn of the Screw*, Meghan put in countless hours and was a true asset to the program. She will continue as the assistant stage manager for *La Bohème*. Her career goal is to be a high school choral director, perhaps followed by a Master's Degree in theater education.

**Sarah Kendall**, a soprano, calls Lakeland, FL home town. She attended Harrison School for the Visual and Performing Arts and carried out her undergraduate work at Rollins College in Winter Park, FL. At UW, she is focusing on vocal performance for opera. At Harrison High School, she sang Guinivere in *Camelot*; at Rollins she was the "Second Knitter" in *A Game of Chance* by Seymour Barab; Tessa in *The Gondoliers*; and Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. At UW-Madison, she has been seen as Alice Ford in Verdi's *Falstaff* and several Opera Workshop Scenes, including *La Bohème*, and *Les pêcheurs de perles*. UW-Madison audiences can see her in *A Kurt Weill Cabaret*. In the future, she hopes to live and perform in Germany, as well as teach voice and English in Germany or Austria.

**Elisheva Pront**, a Madison West High School graduate, is a soprano pursuing a degree in Vocal Performance at UW-Madison. She was involved in the Young Shakespeare Players and Children's Theatre of Madison and more recently performed with the Madison Opera Chorus. In 2016-17, Elisheva performed the role of Flora in University Opera's production of *The Turn of the Screw*, was in the chorus of *Falstaff* and appeared in Opera Workshop Scenes. Her Opera Props award helped her participate in a summer voice program in New York City and will be useful during her fall Study Abroad semester in Vienna. Elisheva hopes to sing and perform, and eventually, to teach and/or direct.

**Jiabao Zhang** is from Wuhan, China. A tenor, he studied at UW-Madison under James Doing and received a Master's degree in Vocal Performance. He has portrayed Don Curzio in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Bardolph in *Falstaff*. He now lives in St. Louis, MO. He plans to keep performing in the future as well as give voice lessons.

**Alec Brown** was seen last summer as Ralph Rackstraw in the Madison Savoyards production of *HMS Pinafore*. While completing his Bachelor's degree at the University of Dayton, Alec's performance opportunities ranged from singing for composers Lucy Simon and Jake Heggie through UD Opera Workshop tours throughout Ohio and to Milwaukee and Saginaw, MI. He was a member of the Dayton Opera Apprenticeship Program and made his professional debut with Dayton Opera in *Dead Man Walking*. During academic year 2016-17, Alec served as an opera teaching assistant, performing the role of Prologue/Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*, stage managing *Falstaff*, and singing in as well as directing scenes for Opera Workshop Scenes. Alec can be seen next performing in University Opera's production of *A Kurt Weill Cabaret*.

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