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**Prostitution as Power: Selected Works of Lotte Lenya
(1910-1940)**

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Abstract

Despite extensive research completed on gender and sexuality in music, the theme of prostitution on stage has remained hidden from serious musical scholarship. In this dissertation an exploration of the theme will take place in selected works of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, regarding the leading female figure of their works - Lotte Lenya.

In an attempt to address this theme within specific confinements, this thesis engages in a scholarly and critical examination of selected songs from the collaborative work of Weill and Brecht. An investigation of these works will help uncover societies attitudes towards prostitution at this time and show how this theme was portrayed on stage. It will also consider what impact Lenya's personal past had on the portrayal of these roles.

In response to recent academic writing on this subject this thesis will raise issues of the personification of female characters in Weill/Brecht works, and also tackle the issues surrounding that of the female sexualized protagonist. It will emphasize the importance Lenya had on the work of these two collaborators and examine her role within the politicized literature and drama of Brecht at this time, considering, in particular, his views of what theatre should portray to audiences, and how it should be consumed.

Introduction

I. Background to the study

The concept of opera was used directly to resolve a conflict, as a plot-advancing device, and hence had to be presented in its purest, most primordial form, claimed Kurt Weill speaking about *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera).¹ Weill has been labeled an ultra-modernist because he has not hesitated to use unorthodox instruments and any other means at his disposal to convey his thought or emotions to the listener. In Bertolt Brecht's writing, he aims to situate both the artist and viewer within and in conscious relation to the historical present in order to create a position of active, critical involvement. The collaborative work of Weill and Brecht was short lived, but produced several successful works including the production of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928. Weill composed many works that his wife Lotte Lenya performed. One of Lenya's leading roles was as the character Jenny in Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, for which she was widely acclaimed. The relationship between Weill and his wife plays a key role in these collaborative works. With Lenya performing the majority of the key characters, this had an impact on the type of works produced and the reception these works had.

II. Aims of the Study

My aim is to examine how the character of the prostitute was represented in key collaborative works of Weill and Brecht. I intend to do this by studying these works in relation to Weill's wife Lenya. In setting out to achieve these aims I will first consider the social context at the time, and the political climate in Germany from 1910-1940.

¹ Stephen Hinton, *Weill's Musical Theater : Stages of Reform* (California: University of California Press, 2012), p. 116.

I will also examine the writing of Brecht in the 1920's, and examine his views and ideals of both women and German society at this time. I will then examine the artistic collaboration between Weill and his wife and consider Lenya's role as a co-creator and muse. To achieve a full sense of the relationship between Weill and Lenya, I will also study the letters they exchanged both when they lived in Germany, their years of exile and also their years of separation. From my research on this topic there has been extensive work completed on Weill studies, similarly with Brecht studies. There is, however, a gap in the research in relation to studies on both Lenya and Weill and also in relation to Lenya herself as an artistic collaborator, muse and performer. Some key works I will examine in this study are, 'Pirate Jenny' from Weill's *Threepenny Opera* in 1928, in which Lotte played the role of Jenny. In 'Nannas Lied' composed in 1939, from the Brechtian text sung by a female prostitute, and 'Alabama song' from the 1930 epic play, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny), Lenya again plays the leading female role.

III. Research Questions

Several research questions need to be answered. Firstly we must consider the role of women in German society at the time, examining this in relation to their social status, the roles they held and how they were portrayed.

Secondly, we must consider Brecht's perception of women. In examining this we can then discern from the libretti of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* the portrayal of the prostitute character from the eyes of Brecht, and how in turn Lenya conveyed her character on stage. There are also questions regarding the artistic relationship between Weill and Lenya. Their relationship was one of a unique nature, with questions arising regarding Lenya's artistic input on Weill's

work as to whether she was a collaborator, co-creator and/or muse to his work. There are also questions in relation to how Lenya's past experience as a prostitute could have shaped her artistic creation and interpretation of the roles. To discover if she sought to critique societal attitudes to women in her performances is an aspect I wish to examine.

Other areas I will consider are in relation to female sexuality and specifically the character of the prostitute both in the libretti and how she is portrayed on stage in these works. I intend to analyze to what degree the theme of prostitution is explored in these works, and to what extent they are representative of how women were viewed in German society at this time. With this in mind it also raises questions regarding gender imbalance on stage and the binary hierarchy of the male and female characters, closely examining this hierarchy beyond its binary division.

IV. Rationale for the Study

I believe there is an existing gap in the research and literature on this topic. This research will open up the topic of creative collaboration in Weill- Lenya studies and thereby contribute to existing research. To fully understand and appreciate the work of Weill we must look at both composer and performer, the role of muse and even co-creator Lenya played in his work. This research will address the existing lacuna in relation to the theme of prostitution on stage in German music theatre. It is an under researched area in Weill-Lenya studies and surprising also in relation to Brecht-Weill studies.

V. Delimitations of the Study

Within the scope of this thesis, it has been possible only to offer a mere portion of the possible works to examine in relation to this theme. In narrowing down my research I limited it to the collaborative works of Weill and Brecht. In doing this I was able to

focus on specific roles that Lenya had played in implicit detail. The inclusion of Brecht I feel is a necessary one. Not only was he a leading librettist in Germany but he is famous for his social critique, and he also became a close friend of the Weills. The emphasis of this research is not based on Brecht for this reason, the emphasis is focused on Lenya playing the role of the prostitute and the correlation of her past experience as a streetwalker, with the literature of Brecht as a strong basis to ground this research. This will focus on examining how she helped shape these different roles and consider her influence on other characters and roles she played throughout this time.

VI. Methodology

My primary method of research for this thesis will be a systematic and historical musicological approach, based on primary and secondary source material.

My method of research will focus on the Brechtian text, the music which Weill wrote, and performances of these works by Lenya. The inherent power of these three inter-relating disciplines opens up a dialectic appropriate to the richness of the area being investigated. In looking at the text analysis both in terms of the musical text and the written text, both will provide an essential tool in shedding light on my research questions. My interpretation of these texts will be through theoretical frameworks including grounded theory and gender studies. I believe this research will help add to the breadth of research already completed on this topic and help open up this topic for further discussion.

In looking at realizations of Brecht plays, and works of Weill on stage, we can take from them their own theoretical methods for 'epic theatre'. For example in *Aufstieg und Fall der Mahagonny* this work is empirical to the Brecht theories on the role of music and the shift from 'dramatic' to 'epic' opera.

VII. Literature Overview

Donald Spoto has written on Lenya and her life in his book, *Lenya: A Life*, exploring aspects of her childhood growing up in Vienna, to her life in Berlin in the 1920's all the way up to her life in America with Weill.² Spoto explores all aspects of Lenya's life onstage and off stage creating a well-rounded picture of Lenya's life. Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, have translated and edited letters from Weill and Lenya in their book, *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*.³ This book gives a full overview of the couple during their periods apart, giving an insight into the relationship of the Weills had, including their time of separation. There has also been extensive literature written on Weill himself and his stage works, for example Stephen Hinton's book on *Weill's Musical Theater: Stages of Reform*.⁴ Hinton's book provides an in depth knowledge of Weill's stage works and a critical outlook on the reception of his works, and the developments of his theatrical works chronologically.

A key source in my research in relation to Brecht literature is, *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, the second edition co-edited by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks.⁵ This book provides crucial guidance on virtually every aspect of Brecht's work. Spanning from his life growing up in Germany, to his life and cabaret, his early plays and influences, right up to his specific theories and practices. This book provides a well-rounded view of Brecht's writing and gives specific insights into his work with Weill.

² Donald Spoto, *Lenya: A Life* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1989)

³ Lys Symonette, and Kim H. Kowalke, *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996)

⁴ Stephen Hinton, *Weill's Musical Theater: Stages of Reform* (California: University of California Press, 2012)

⁵ Peter Thomson, and Glendyr Sacks, *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

With regards to gender and women's sexuality on stage, there is an extensive breadth of literature to choose from. In this aspect of my research my aim is to focus on the theme of prostitution portrayed on stage in German theatre in the 1920s. In doing this exploring seminal and recent gender studies texts is vital. Susan McClary's book, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* offers a possible method for feminist music criticism, and deals with issues such as music's construction of sexuality and gender, and music as gendered discourse.⁶ This book gives a critical backdrop into the research thus far on gender studies and also on the sexual politics and musical representation of women. Providing my research with a fundamental framework on which to build, Katharina Pewny's paper on gender politics entitled, 'Staging Difference: Theatre- Representation- Politics' in *Topics in Feminism, History and Philosophy*, also gives a critical backdrop on feminism and gender representation in the theatre.⁷

Looking at research then specifically in regards to the theme of prostitution and the modern woman in Germany, Jill Suzanne Smith's book, *Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought: Berlin Coquette: Prostitution and the New German Woman, 1890-1933*, is a vital read in relation to the portrayal of the female protagonist on stage and also in relation to the theme of prostitution.⁸

With the addition of Russell Campbell's book, *Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema*, giving another critical insight into the theme.⁹

⁶ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

⁷ Katharina Pewny, 'Staging Difference: Theatre- Representation- Politics' in *Topics in Feminism, History and Philosophy* IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 6, (Vienna, 2000), pp. 1-11.

⁸ Jill Suzanne Smith, *Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought: Berlin Coquette: Prostitution and the New German Woman, 1890-1933* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014)

⁹ Russell Campbell, *Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006)

VIII. Difficulties of the Study

In completing my research I have encountered some difficulties in the process. At the beginning of my research I grappled with the idea of prostitution in German theatre. In narrowing down my research I felt it necessary to focus on one performer and look at some of their performances individually. In choosing Lenya as my point of focus I then had to weigh up the emphasis I would place on Lenya, Weill and Brecht. This proved difficult in that all three play a contributing factor in the production of the work, so each element needed to be analyzed equally and weighted in terms of the argument presented, and yet keep my focus on Lenya.

Another difficulty I encountered was the sheer volume of research completed on this topic. There has been extensive research on the lives of both Weill and Lenya, the letters they exchanged, and also more broadly on gender and sexuality in theatre studies. With such a large breadth of research it can be hard to argue for the significance of my own research within the body of research already completed. One angle in was found when I realized that there has (surprisingly) been little work on the representation of the women in the collaborative works of Weill and Brecht, nor is there extensive literature completed on the theme of prostitution within these collaborative works. While Lenya's biography has attracted attention, no serious analysis of the creative nature of her role as the leading character and her impact on these Weill and Brecht's works. This is the crux on which my thesis lies. This perspective is new in the reception of all three artists.

Chapter 1 The Art of Storytelling: The Women of Berlin Theatre

1.1 1980s Vienna – A Culture in Crisis

Lotte Lenya grew up in Vienna, a country where the lack of social coherence provoked widespread anxiety and produced an elaborate cultural narcissism. Moral rectitude was preached everywhere, but it coexisted comfortably with general public acceptance of child prostitution. Religious affiliation was affirmed on official identity papers, but a scorn for religion marked ordinary Viennese social discourse. Consistent with this tangled fabric of political, social and cultural life was a shift in public attitude about sensuality and sex. There was a sudden emergence of the erotic in public life in the 1980s, a wild new celebration of the body and its freedom. This readily available profession of prostitution was not constricted to alleys and back streets. In Vienna prostitutes were seen on every city street block, there was certainly no shortage. Symptomatic of this open exoticism were the blatantly personal advertisements seen in *Die Zeit*, the national German newspaper. For example, an extract from 1898 journal:

Young lieutenant wishes to meet girl in pink dress and
Grey hat waiting in front of the Hotel Erzherzog-Karl . . .¹⁰

Lenya grew up in the area of Penzing in Vienna, conditions of her childhood were bleak. With an alcoholic, abusive father there was very little income and living conditions were poor for herself and her family. Her father's rage was targeted at Lenya as she was named after her mother's first child, Linnerl, who had died at just three years old of a fever. Linnerl would dance and sing for her father, but when Lenya did not meet her father needs (or when he realized she was not his dead daughter), Lenya would

¹⁰ Donald Spoto, 'The Coachman's Daughter (1898-1920)' in, *Lenya: A Life* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1989), p. 16.

have to endure his abuse. Lenya understood her father's brutality as expressing a resentment of her; as the abused child Lenya saw her own life as the cause of violence.¹¹

1.2 Germany's Cultural Hub

Musical theatre was one of the most important popular cultures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Twentieth century musical theatre was a representation of modern cosmopolitan life, engaging in complex ways with ideas about the modern world, registering and shaping contemporary attitudes to class, gender and national identities and articulating mainstream political issues. Berlin was the epicenter for this flourish in musical theatre, with Berlin developing its own *Theatergegend* (theatre district) on Friedrichstraße, a long street stretching from the southernmost part of the city to its north, intersected by Unter den Linden, Berlin's famous boulevard.¹² The theatre-going public needed escapist entertainment during the dark times of World War I, and they flocked to the theatre. During the years of the Weimar republic (1919 to 1933) Berlin was at the hectic center of the Weimar culture. The theatres of Berlin were graced with drama by Ernst Toller and Bertolt Brecht, with many theatrical works sympathetic towards Marxist themes, or overt experiments in propaganda, as seen at the agitprop theatre in the works of Brecht and Weill.

Weill called for musical theatre to alter its course, in order to attract a wider portion of the population.¹³ In 1929 Weill proclaimed, "The boundaries between 'art music' and 'music for use' must be brought closer together and gradually eliminated. That's why we've attempted to compose music that's capable of meeting the musical

¹¹ Spoto, p. 25.

¹² Len Platt, Tobias Becker and David Linton, *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin: 1890-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2014), p. 4.

¹³ Lily E. Hirsch, *Jewish Orchestra in Nazi Germany: Musical Politics and the Berlin Jewish Culture League* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 71.

needs of the broad population without giving up artistic substance”.¹⁴ To generate this broad appeal and obliterate the distinction between high and low art, Weill and other Weimar-era composers represented the everyday life of the 1920’s on stage. Here they reflected an understanding of the Weimar era as a technical age and often made use of such props as trains and cars in their works. Weill’s representation of social norms of this time, can be seen clearly throughout his works and will be explored further on in detail with the focus on specific works regarding the representation of women on stage.

1.3 Kinder, Kirche and Küche

During the years 1918 to 1932, no other group was affected as much as German women, as they bore the brunt of societies expectations for the future stability and health of the German nation. For centuries, a woman’s role in German society was summed up and circumscribed by Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen). The Nazi ideology for women was that they belonged at home and their sole purpose was to be eternal companions of men, to bear and tend to children. With the coming of National Socialism, the process of female emancipation was reversed: her degradation and depersonalization became an element of German ideology. In looking at the traditional portrayal women of this time, it is interesting to note how women were portrayed on the theatre stage which was anything but traditional, perhaps pointing to a double standard.

The Weimar Constitution of 1919 enacted equality in education for the sexes, equal opportunity in civil service appointments, and equal pay in the professions, with Germany’s Reichstag having thirty-two women deputies in 1926. The Weimar

¹⁴ Michael H. Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 84.

Republic was an era of political fragmentation in Germany. Weimar culture in general had a degree of social chaos, with war widows and their children struggling to earn a living in a city where hunger, unemployment, and crime were rampant. Although in Nazi Germany the perceived role of women was solely to bear children and devote themselves to their home and their husband, this was not always the case. Before 1933 women played an important role in the Nazi organization, allowing women some independence in order to rally other women for the party.

The role of women on stage is an interesting aspect to examine, and in doing this we can discover exactly how women were portrayed on stage and the attitudes German society had at this time. In *Mahagonny Songspiel* the city has four main attractions: whiskey, women, horses and poker. This view of women as an object by the librettist is clearly seen from the outset. American critic Olin Downes gave the work a favorable review in the *New York Times* in the 1940s, mentioning the original sketches of *Mahagonny* as not so pleasant.¹⁵ Downes referred to the performance at the Baden-Baden as being “skeletonized”, this was in reference to not having a fuller staging, Brecht had apparently wanted the two female characters in the play (Jessie and Bessie) to appear in the nude. Although this did not transpire, it shows the intention to provoke or even shock.

1.4 A Thriving Work Environment

In the spring of 1912, before she could finish her secondary schooling, Lenya, at the age of thirteen, left school. She began work as an apprentice seamstress. She joined a well-established, highly visible and socially disreputable company in Vienna. This was

¹⁵ Stephen Hinton, *Weill's Musical Theatre: Stages of Reform* (California: University of California Press, 2012), p. 107.

short lived, however, and Lenya soon returned to work as a prostitute. Vienna's streets and alleys during the early years of this century were teeming with prostitutes of all ages, many teenagers and even younger. It is no surprise that Lenya joined these girls as an escape from her abusive home life. Selling herself from the age of eleven, she was thrown into a grotesque environment of degrading abuse.

In the early autumn of 1921 Lenya and her friend Grete boarded a train to Berlin, in the hope of becoming instant stars. The serious cultural life of Berlin excited Lenya from the day she arrived. Her instinct for the theatre, her native intelligence, her spontaneity, openness and eager willingness to learn made her an apt pupil for the classroom that was Berlin society.¹⁶ Parallel to her life in Vienna, Berlin at this time had a thriving nightlife and lustier side to its culture. On the Friedrichstrasse, in Berlin's center, bare-breasted prostitutes chatted with customers at the Café Nationale, and at the Apollo nude dancers of both sexes kicked and cavorted while customers found private rooms upstairs for intimate time with offstage performers. But Berlin life was not just a case of high art or low life. In 1921 there was a record unemployment rate, many workers could not afford rent rates and became drifters.

Lenya's mentor Richard Révy was living in Berlin at this time and she contacted him soon after her arrival. She took private lessons with Révy, who coached her in many roles that would be helpful for her future. Révy introduced Lenya to Georg Kaiser, leading German playwright, Kaiser invited Lenya to their holiday home in early 1924 in Grünheide, a country spot just outside the city, she soon hit it off with the family and their children so by then end of the summer of 1924 she became an au pair for the Kaisers.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 47.

1.5 Grünheide and the Rowboat

In May 1924, Kurt Weill moved into a small apartment with Kaiser to begin work on what we now know was *Der Protagonist*, the one act tragic opera. When their collaboration moved to Grünheide, Lenya was asked to meet Weill at the train station and escort him across the river in a rowboat.¹⁷ From this day that Weill and Lenya saw each other more and more, and their relationship flourished. Lenya, unspoiled by a formal musical education, had a raw energy which Weill found fascinating and was in direct contrast to Weill's serious personality. Her temperament enabled him to pursue the life of a creative artist, with the solitude that it requires, but his tendency for gravity needed the healthy kind of balance that Lenya could provide. If they were separated for more than a few days, Weill wrote to Lenya. These letters show the depth of their relationship and the complete attachment they had to each other. The earliest letters date from 1924, this abstract from one of the earliest letters is from Weill in Berlin to Lenya at the Kaiser's in Grünheide in the summer of 1924:

It's true that you need a human being who belongs to you, because there has to be someone to whom you don't need to lie. It's also true that this someone has to be me.

[...] Do come soon. Please.

Your, Kurt Weill.¹⁸

In March 1925, Weill completed the score for *Der Protagonist*, which he dedicated "to Lotte Lenya". In a civil ceremony at the City Hall of Charlottenburg Berlin, Kurt Julian Weill and Karoline Charlotte Blamauer were married on January 28, 1926. The marriage of Weill and Lenya, was from the start, far from traditional.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁸ Lys Symonette, and Kim H. Kowalke, translated and eds, *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p. 40.

Lenya insisted on her freedom to pursue her own path sexually, professionally and even geographically, for often she stayed in Grünheide while her husband worked in Berlin.

1.6 Powerful Music and Cynicism: A Perfect Match

In early 1927, Weill was commissioned to create a work for the summer music festival at Baden-Baden, a gathering of composers, musicians and critics led by Paul Hindemith. He needed the right librettist for a short opera, and after reviewing a radio performance of Bertolt Brecht's play, *Man is Man* they soon met and Weill had his librettist in Brecht.¹⁹ This resulted in their first collaboration *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (1927), also known as *The Little Mahagonny*, a small-scale scenic cantata, which was in preparation for their full-length opera they intended to write, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (*The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 1930).

The Little Mahagonny was based on five 'Mahagonny Songs', which had been published earlier in the year in Brecht's collection of poetry, *Devotions for the Home* (*Hauspostille*), together with melodies by Brecht. To these five was added a new poem, *Poem on a Dead Man*, which was to form the finale. Lenya played the role of Jessie in the work with her solo in the 'Alabama Song'. Brecht helped Lenya overcome her performance anxiety and also with her stage presence. Her contributions to the enduring popularity of the Weill-Brecht works were not in terms of the size of the roles nor any great dimension she bestowed, but in terms of a stylistic focus she gave them. Lenya was their muse, and continuously gripped spectators by bringing them back to clear confrontations with elemental human feelings and experiences.²⁰

¹⁹ Spoto, p. 71.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 76.

Brecht's influence on Weill must have been enormous, from his ideas on 'epic theatre' to the insights of American and European culture. At the time Weill and Brecht met, Brecht had just begun a systematic study of the work of Karl Marx, who believed that what was needed was a politicized literature, and a drama that would demonstrate how the world could, and must, be changed.²¹ Art as communication was an unwavering principle for Brecht. Most famously with their hit *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*), but also with numerous other collaborative pieces, the duo represented everything that the Nazi regime declared its enemy. The Jewish Weill and the Marxist Brecht were some of the earliest targets of Nazi cultural oppression. *The Threepenny Opera* premiered on August 31, 1928, established Weill as one of the most successful composers of Weimar Germany. Weill's powerful music, combined with the cynicism and social criticism of Brecht's libretto, had produced one of the most important cultural creations of inter-war Europe. During the 1920s Weill was conscious of the social functions of music. When meeting Brecht the pairs achievement and collaboration provided an inspiration to search for a socially aware music theatre that takes the best from opera and theatre, and transforms them into a dynamic and balanced whole.²²

1.7 Brecht and His Women: Defying Categorization?

Brecht was a life long atheist but admired the austere realism of Roman literature, and was fascinated by oriental poetry and theatre. Brecht's attitude towards German romantic drama was highly ambivalent. He admired Schiller and adapted Goethe's

²¹ Ronald Taylor, *Kurt Weill: Composer in a Divided World* (London: Simon & Schuster Ltd, 1991), p. 103.

²² Stephen McNeff, 'The Threepenny Opera' in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 2nd edition, ed. by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2006), pp. 88-89.

Urfaust, but was suspicious of their status.²³ While he recognized that their plays were full of social and political energy, he saw how the Nazis exploited their innocent nationalism. So instead he identified with a drama more rooted in experience and rich in politics. Brecht's plays consistently defy categorization, he constantly fused the old with the new creating a rich texture and multi-dimensionality evident in his work.

Brecht surrounded himself with a circle of dedicated women. The most important was his wife Helena Weigel (1900-71), she was a great actress and took many roles in Brecht's plays, staying in his life as the chief executive of the Berliner Ensemble until her death. Elizabeth Hauptmann was also a major influence in Brecht's life, providing him with a background in English literature and also situated as his lifelong editor, secretary and textual collaborator.²⁴ In the 1920's Brecht met Margarete Steffin (1908-41) a working class actress in Berlin, who became one of his closest lovers, and collaborated with him on many of his successful works. She took a diction class from Brecht's wife at the time Helene Weigel, and played the role of a maid in Brecht's play *Die Mutter* (1932). Steffin not only played roles in his works but was also a great contributor to Brecht's writings. Brecht's 1955 *Collected Works* names Steffin as the collaborator on *Roundheads and Peakheads*, *Señora Carrar's Rifles* and *The Horatians and the Curiatians*. Brecht also wrote six short poems on hearing of her death, published together as *Nach dem Tod meiner Mitarbeiterin M. S.*

In 1933 Brecht met yet another actress, Danish Ruth Berlau (1904-74), who was also a journalist with whom he had an affair. She also collaborated with him on several occasions. She also collaborated with him closely as his secretary as well as writing, translating, photographing and directing with Brecht. It is evident from this Brecht had

²³ Stephen Unwin, *A Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2005), p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

a close relationship with his lovers and collaborators and held great affection and attention for them as both in his life.

Stephen Unwin has commented on Brecht's relationship with his female collaborators, and how critics have painted him as a male chauvinist only in these relationships for personal gain, giving nothing in return. Unwin explains that, 'such views neither explain their devotion to him, nor detract from the great contributions they made to his work'.²⁵ It is clear that regardless of how he felt about these women they contributed greatly to his professional output, as did many of his other male collaborators. Brecht's success depended on these collaborations, they were an essential chain in his theatrical success. His numerous infidelities and two marriages could point to a lesser view of women but cannot be certain. Brecht's thoughts on theatre were based around the idea that opera draws in the audience on an emotional level, a level of human experience, one that gives from performer to audience member a feeling of realism and empathy, a relatable experience with only enjoyment and pleasure felt.²⁶ The close relationships Brecht had gave him his relatable realism he searched for. They provided him with that level of human experience, from actress Ruth Berlau, to Margarete Steffin playing roles in his work and as a collaborator on several texts.

1.8 Prostitution in Writing – Brecht's Libretti

One major aspect seen on stage and prevalent in German culture was the theme of prostitution. In Imperial Germany (1871–1918) attitudes to prostitution were ambivalent. While prostitution was tolerated as a necessary function to provide for male

²⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

²⁶ McNeff, p. 85.

sexuality outside of marriage, it was frowned on as a threat to contemporary moral images of women's sexuality. While this was the case, it is estimated that in the early 1900s there were 50,000 women working as prostitutes in Berlin alone.

Jill Smith discusses in her book, *Berlin Coquette: Prostitution and the New German Woman, 1890-1933*, the theme of prostitution and its representation on stage in German theatre. In particular Smith makes reference to some Weill-Brecht works such as *The Threepenny Opera* and the *Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Smith claims that in *The Threepenny Opera* the character Jenny, who is a prostitute is, "represented as a figure of bourgeois faddishness and points to Brecht's appropriation of popular entertainment forms and his relentless satire of his illusory and manipulative nature".²⁷ Smith also refers to Brecht's libretto asking the reader about it succeeding in its portrayal of the hypocrisy of a bourgeoisie. These libretti illustrating suffering and pain are portrayed on stage as a form of entertainment. Smith touches on the ideals and standards of the German audience and also on the librettists thought and ideals on this aspect of prostitution in German society. While I believe that Smith makes a valid point in relation to how prostitution is portrayed on stage, as a 'figure of bourgeois faddishness', it is unclear how Brecht's writing on this topic can be coined 'illusory'. This is an aspect of societal understanding of prostitution in the early 1920s, I believe Brecht's appropriation of popular entertainment forms in his libretti are but an echo of these societal beliefs and understanding. With this said, it can be seen in the early 20's that Brecht's political views became more prominent and to the forefront of his libretti, this aspect of his personality can be seen throughout his work, and in this way echoes his view of women, Germany and the social and political state it was in. Brecht's

²⁷ Jill Suzanne Smith, *Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought: Berlin Coquette: Prostitution and the New German Woman, 1890-1933* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 137.

attitude towards woman can also clearly be seen in his romantic relationships not only with his two wives Paula Banholzer and Helene Weigel, but also with many other 'personal assistants' and collaborators he acquired. The hedonistic self-centeredness of his private life had its counterpart in the way he viewed his professional interests.²⁸ Brecht had a strong independent personality and in matters of stage production things were either done his way, or not at all.

1.9 Conclusions

Berlin culture was extremely vibrant and held tremendous opportunities for Lenya as a singer and actress. From her grim childhood in Vienna, with physiological abuse and rejection from her father, to her not so successful career in Berlin on her first arrival in 1921, Lenya showed her determinacy, dedication and strength as an actress and singer. She always stood for the actress who sings, not, like the opera star, the singer who acts. Lenya knew when marrying Weill she would come second place to his work, and it was only by injecting herself into his work by being a direct part of his musical productions that this gap was fused closer. Perhaps it was this discontent that drove her to seek out the relationship of other men. Although this may be the case Lenya and Weill both consented to this open relationship and when challenged about her waywardness by Weill's life long friend Maurice Abravanel she protested: 'But I don't cheat on Kurt. He knows exactly what's going on!'.²⁹

Lenya's stage roles have been of a somewhat similar character each time, even with the majority composed to the music of her husband. Lenya's first successful role was in the *Mahagonny Songspiel* (1927), in which she sang the part of Jessie (not Jenny,

²⁸ Taylor, p. 102.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 89.

as she frequently said later). In the full-length 1930 opera, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, Lenya sang the role of Jenny. With the city of Mahagonny growing rapidly it is soon populated by prostitutes led by Jenny. Lenya's next role was in the 1928 opera and 1931 film, *The Threepenny Opera*, again in the character of a prostitute. 'Pirate Jenny', a prostitute in the local brothel, sings of her revenge. Lenya's Jenny is soiled and dangerous, to be sure, but she makes the character human and credible.³⁰ In March 1933 Lenya, moved to Paris where she sang the leading part in the Weill-Brecht 'sung ballet', *The Seven Deadly Sins*. The story tells of two sisters, Anna I and Anna II. Anna I, the singer, is the principal vocal role (which Lenya plays), and Anna II is the dancer (or mime). Making their fortune men are seduced, robbed, blackmailed and driven to suicide by the two Annas. This role again linked to Lenya's previous roles as a prostitute, at the hands of the male character. In these works Lenya is playing the part of a whore, characterized by resentment, despair and anger. In this way she is playing the part of herself, turning private reminiscences into public art.

From this we can see that the theme of prostitution is seen frequently on the theatrical stage. This aspect of degrading women is used as a form of entertainment, an entertainment that was consumed by growing theatre audiences, portraying prostitution as an act of performance, reflecting the paradox characteristic in the figure of the prostitute, a figure that can both affirm and subvert social structures. The libretti of these works are filled with this perception of women, this one-dimensional drawing of the female character has a lack of critical interest in gender dynamics, as Christian Rogowski describes it, "The world of Brecht's plays is a man's world".³¹

³⁰ Spoto, p. 99.

³¹ Smith, p. 139.

Chapter 2 Weill and Lenya: Composer and Performer, Collaborator or Muse?

2.1 A Crushing Responsibility

Linerl, Bubili, and Lenya-Benya are some of the nicknames Weill used for Lenya, opening many of his letters to her with these and many more. To their close friends and the public the Weills seemed an unlikely couple. They married in June of 1926, separated in 1932, and in 1933 finally divorced. Their relationship was one of mutual artistic appreciation. They were an artistic duo that depended on each other; one could not survive without the other. In 1937 after their separation, Weill and Lenya reunited in Paris and travelled to New York where they remarried and applied together for their American citizenship. As Kim H. Kowalke characterizes their relationship in his co-edited book, *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, he describes their relationship as to have always been, even through their years of separation, “Simultaneously tenacious and tumultuous, open to and always surviving many secondary romantic and sexual relationships”.³² Unlike other artistic duos, Weill and Lenya did not just meet and fall in love like some of their other friends and colleagues such as Moss Hart and Kitty Carlisle or Helen Hayes and Charles MacArthur. Weill and Lenya needed each other on a creative level that transcended ordinary emotional, erotic, or professional bonds. It was this interdependence that fused these two people together. Even in their years of infidelity and in their years of separation and divorce they continued to stay in constant contact and continued to collaborate on new music. This is not just evident to us as scholars and readers, Weill himself commented on their mutual artistic appreciation in a letter to his parents in 1925 about how he was now finding himself as a composer stating,

³² Ibid, p. 1.

“I have become noticeably more independent, more confident, happier, and less tense. Of course living with Lenya again accounts for much of this. [...] It’s the only way I could put up with living alongside someone: a coexistence of two differing artistic interests, without domestic ties, each one helping the other on his own course. [...]”³³

She was giving voice to his music and he was giving music to her voice. Even though Lenya had no educational background or musical training like Weill, her canny theatrical sensitivity and innate intelligence enabled her to become Weill’s most trusted critic as well as his most famous interpreter.³⁴ Lenya has also commented years later on her performances of Weill’s work describing to *The New York Times* how, “When I do a film that has nothing to do with Kurt Weill, then I am happy, I am on my own, [...] But in a Kurt Weill work I am as nervous as a cat. A burden falls on my shoulders. I feel a crushing responsibility”.³⁵

This quote from Lenya tells a great deal about her personal character. As argued Lenya helped shape the work Weill wrote during 1910-1940, and was the face of his music during this time. It is evident from newspaper reviews, and critic articles she was a roaring success in Weill’s work and was highly accounted for her performances. I believe in the latter years of her life Lenya felt this burden as it was a standard she felt she could not meet any more. There have been accounts in later years of Lenya needing to lower the key of some of her works as she could not successfully reach the notes any longer. She had Weill at her finger tips during her time on stage to write music that suited her unique voice perfectly. She felt this nervousness when performing his works

³³ Kim H. Kowalke, p. 2.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

³⁵ John Rockwell, ‘Lotte Lenya, Singer-Actress In U.S. and Germany, Is Dead’, Article in *The New York Times* Obituaries, Published: November 28, 1981
<<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/28/obituaries/lotte-lenya-singer-actress-in-us-and-germany-is-dead.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 20 March 2016]

years later as they had been performed so successfully in their day, and now she had the responsibility to perform them at the same standard.

Lenya was not a traditional muse to a composer. Her presence to Weill was not a necessity, he would still write without her there, but she was an essential tool in his compositional output. Lenya was both a collaborator and muse to Weill, but neither in a traditional sense of the word. During their time apart from each other Weill would continuously write to Lenya and tell her about every aspect of his working day. This constant writing even persisted during the time they were not in a romantic relationship. Weill would write in his letters to Lenya telling her to take care of herself and not loose too much weight.³⁶ He would also end with a quirky nickname or personal closing remark such as:

Knüsschen, mein Affenschwänzchen [little kisses, my monkey tail]

Your eternal hubby

Bibilboy³⁷

2.2 With Independence Comes Unreliability

Weill's music launched Lenya's career; before she met him she was a struggling actress trying to get any role she could. Even though their artistic interdependence was one that suited them both, Weill's music came first, and he openly admitted this to Lenya. For Lenya this was not enough, she needed more both personally and professionally. She sought other companionship, and so did he. In Germany when Lenya's most loving affair took place with an Austrian tenor whom she called "the Flying Dutchman", Weill cast him in both *Mahagonny* and *Die sieben Todsünden* so that he and Lenya could be together. Weill in turn fell in love with Erika Neher, the wife of the famous set designer Casper Neher, a onetime librettist of his, who remained Weill's good friend

³⁶ Ibid, Letter 385, Weill in Naharia to Lenya in New City, 27 May 1947, pp. 417-472.

³⁷ Ibid, Letter 393, Weill in Los Angeles to Lenya in Philadelphia, 25 November 1948, p.482.

throughout.³⁸ During their period of separation, Lenya maintained a relationship with a young tenor Otto von Pasetti, with whom she travelled to Monte Carlo where she learned how to gamble, but was not very good at it. When their money ran out, Lenya wrote to Weill for a loan, and immediately he wired the first of several large payments to her. He also reminded her that there was another way of earning money – work.

It is evident that even through both of their infidelities they stayed in close contact and never stopped their correspondence. Lenya herself until her death maintained, contrary to all circumstantial and documentary evidence, that the divorce had been entirely strategic, designed to protect Weill's assets. She and Pasetti did manage to smuggle some of Weill's money out of Germany, but apparently lost all of it at roulette on the Riviera. This is however not completely certain, as no written correspondence has survived from Weill and Lenya from June of 1932 until January 1933, the next correspondence after this is from Weill to Lenya in January of 1933. In early 1933 Weill invited both Lenya and Pasetti to Paris to take part in a work on which he was working with Brecht: *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Lenya would play the part of Anna 1 and Pasetti would sing the lead tenor part of the father. Viennese actress Tilly Losch played Anna 2, and soon after rehearsals started a romantic affair emerged between the two Annas. This was short lived and was happening in parallel to her affair with Pasetti.

On June 23, 1934 an application to dissolve their marriage was filed by mail. This was the single act Lenya would regret for the rest of her life. "Leaving him by divorce", Lenya's friend Hilde Halpern said later, "filled her with guilt", and with good reason.³⁹ Donald Spoto writes about this time of her life in terms of Lenya 'severing

³⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁹ Donald Spoto, 'Jessie and Jenny, 1927-1935' in *Lenya: A Life* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1989), pp. 71-120.

her most important relationship'. Spoto believes while much of her life often seemed a futile attempt to address her relationship with her father, Lenya seems to have appreciated that Weill was in fact a providing, forgiving and gentle companion.⁴⁰ Weill offered Lenya some of the very qualities she needed and longed for in a stable union. While I believe her relationship with her father did bear some influence on her life, I do not fully believe this is why Lenya severed her relationship with Weill. I believe Lenya dealt with periods in her life differently, and held a cynical approach to love. At this time in her life her relationship to Weill was based on great admiration and a genuine affection. She held a professional and financial bond to Weill as well as a psychological and emotional one at this time. While I do believe she regretted this move it was her way of dealing with things, and her bond to Weill was more easily broken then.

Even in their periods of infidelity Weill was there for Lenya and was still ready with open arms to take her back after their divorce, on any terms she wanted. They were an artistic duo, and exceptionally good friends, they understood each other in a way no one else could. For Weill, he needed Lenya in all aspects of his life, especially as an artistic muse. The same can be said for Lenya, she needed Weill, a stable, giving and forgiving partner that she needed in her life.

In a letter from Weill to Lenya on July 10, 1935 Weill wrote of their reconciliation and how he was so happy to have her back. He expressed his doubts and fears and hoped it would work out this time.

“I think you are a grand *Pison* and that your qualities as a human being keep developing parallel to my own, so that (after ten years!) you are still giving me things that no one else can give me, things that are crucial.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Spoto, p. 78.

⁴¹ Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, Letter 133, Weill in Louveciennes to Lenya in London, p. 180.

It is evident here that the couple relied on each other in their artistic lives. There are little letters from Lenya to Weill therefore the correspondence is largely based on letters Weill wrote to Lenya. This is due to the fact that almost all of Weill's correspondence files were among the manuscripts and books that he left behind when he fled Berlin on short notice in 1933.⁴² Therefore, there is no existing correspondence from Lenya to Weill prior to 1933.

They understood what each other needed to express themselves creatively, although did not understand each other truly. In 1979 Lenya wrote of her late husband and their relationship:

“Some people thought Kurt was arrogant. But he wasn't at all: he was just terribly shy, and that shyness kept people away from him, like a wall he built around himself. Nobody really knew Kurt Weill. I wonder sometimes whether I knew him. I was married to him twenty-four years and we lived together two years without being married, so it was twenty-six years together. When he died, I looked at him, and wasn't sure I really knew him.”⁴³

The above statement from Lenya demonstrates the type of personality Weill had and how in all her years as a wife, companion, and muse she was still unable to uncover the true Kurt Weill. It also says a lot about Lenya, and how she in some ways created a wall between herself and Weill, not ever fully letting him in to truly know her, and never opening up herself to truly know him.

I believe this is also due to her bond with Weill not always being one of love and emotion. Lenya and Weill's relationship, for the most part, was primarily professional and financial. They had great admiration for each other but in Lenya's case she did not

⁴² Ibid, p. 5.

⁴³ Spoto, p. 179.

seek love at this period in her life, her understanding and perception of the world was different, and so were her ideals on love and relationships.

Even though she may have felt feelings of neglect throughout the relationship this was for the most part from her own doing. I feel from the above statement the same can be said about Lenya. She was like an exotic animal to Weill – unpredictable, fascinating, and in some odd way loyal to him.⁴⁴ But Weill also saw clearly that with Lenya's independence came unreliability; he could not count on her presence, her attention or her comfort the way she at times relied on him. He saw her vulnerability, and was aware of her past with her father and the struggle her mother still faced with her new husband. At the end of 1931 Weill instructed his music publisher, Universal Edition in Vienna, to send Lenya's mother one hundred Austrian schillings the first of each month.⁴⁵ He had great admiration and genuine affection for both Lenya and her family. He truly loved Lenya, this can be seen clearly from the letters he wrote to her.

2.3 The Unfulfillment of Brook House

The accounts we have from both Lenya and Weill show a mutual appreciation they had for each other and their work. Weill and Lenya's relationship was a unique one it didn't fit with conventional norms or stereotypical expectations of married couples. To put Lenya in the shadow of her male counterpart I feel is arbitrary. From the letters that have survived one can see the upmost support Weill gave Lenya and how he contributed to his wife's success, even when they were divorced. Weill constantly wrote music to suit Lenya's husky, distinctive voice and landed her many successful roles in his works.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 178.

⁴⁵ p. 104.

“If these people don’t have time for careful rehearsal, I would suggest you do it with piano. [...] I’ll prepare everything for you, the orchestra or piano music will be there on time”.⁴⁶

The above extract is from a letter Weill wrote to Lenya while he was in Berlin and she was in St. Moritz, January 31, 1930. In the letter Weill is writing to Lenya about a Frankfurt radio variety show that will be held on 8 February. He is organizing the music for her and making sure she has all the songs she wishes to sing on the night, he writes a list and follows it by saying, “Write me right away to say whether you agree, so I can get the music together.”⁴⁷ From this interaction, among many others, Weill organizes work for Lenya every step of the way, trying to help her get as much work as possible, he even signs the letter in her name.

Unfortunately this balance between the couple was not always in harmony. In 1941 they decided to move into a house with several other artists on Middagh Street, New York. This house had become a type of academy for some of the best work then being created in America, and was founded by George Davis: novelist and magazine editor, Carson McCullers: an American writer, and Wystan Hugh Auden: an American poet. Lenya adored Brook House, as it was called, according to Burgess Meredith actor and friend living in the house, the Weills were soon more settled than any other members of the community.

“They were surrounded by American antiques, a brook flowing by, and little by little they assumed a kind of conservative lifestyle. At least it seemed that way on the surface”.⁴⁸

But after a year the quiet domesticity had begun to bore Lenya, her natural creative gifts needed professional expression. At this point Weill was becoming quite successful in

⁴⁶ Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, Letter 27, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁸ Spoto, p. 151.

America with *Lady in the Dark* premiering in January 1941 and being an enormous success. Lenya landed little roles at this time and spent most of her days at Brook House. In September 1941 she took part in Maxwell Anderson's play *Candle in the Wind*, but unfortunately for Lenya the work was not so enthusiastically received, bearing relation to the point that Lenya's successful roles were written by her husband, specifically for her and to suited to her needs. Stepping away from this her success was not so colourful. The play had a modest run of ninety-five performances, while many have considered that only for the star attraction of Helen Hayes it would not have endured beyond opening week.⁴⁹

During this time Lenya was finding it hard to settle into American lifestyle, while Weill was thriving. This created a shift yet again in their relationship and Lenya moved out of Brook house and stayed in a small apartment in New York City for her role in *Candle in the Wind*. Hesper Anderson, Maxwell's son living in Brook House at the time, recalled the times Lenya spent there with his mother Mab and Bunny Caniff. He described the hours they would all spend playing cards and the dissatisfaction he could see they felt in their lives. He remembered,

“I think all three women felt unfulfilled at this time in their lives, while their husbands were so successful or at least working hard and getting paid for it. They were the wives of the great ones.”⁵⁰

This unfulfillment was clearly evident in Mabs' case, she had never realized her ambition to become a major star, and seeing her famous husband always occupied sent her into a depression. She confided in Lenya, who also claimed she missed acting and wanted to get back to it. From this we can see a certain echo of 'the woman in the shadow of the composer', yet here Lenya removed herself from the unwanted situation

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 151.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 163.

of not acting, and tried to pick her career back up and achieve the acting career she was missing in America. This shift also led to infidelity once again in their relationship, with Lenya not living at Brook House any longer their relationship was yet again in a different sphere.

2.4 Reliance, Success and Illness

Although Lenya had some resentment of Weill's success during her time at Brook House, this did not last. Lenya did not direct her resentment towards Weill she reflected on herself and knew she wanted to get back to the stage and succeed as a performer. She found it hard to settle on the American stage, now in 1943 there were not many roles for forty-five year old women with thick Viennese accents. She was hard to cast, she and Weill both knew that. Her success in *Candle in the Wind* was a happy memory of the past now. During this time Weill was showing signs of an illness that would eventually kill him, his blood pressure was sky high and his heart rhythm erratic. Even with such accelerating illness Weill was still concerned about Lenya's happiness, he was aggravated and emotionally strained at the disparity between his success and Lenya's. Her inactivity except for the occasional recital rankled both of them by 1944. When Maurice Abravanel urged Weill that year to write an opera, he replied, "Yes, Maurice, yes – but I must first write something for Lenya".⁵¹ In a letter to Lenya in early 1940s Weill wrote about his hopes to write something for her to work on:

"There is no doubt in my mind that you can be a terrific success in this country if we only can get the right play. I thought of sitting down and writing one. The only thing I couldn't do is write dialogue."⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 166.

⁵² p. 167.

From this account we can see Weill's tremendous efforts to land Lenya a role in a successful play. He did fulfill his promise to Lenya and obtained her a role in *Its Happening in Florence*, which premiered February 23, 1945. Although, to his and her dismay, Lenya's performance received poor critique. An account given in the Boston Post on March 4, 1945,

“One of the principals is not suited to her role. Lotte Lenya, as the Duchess, is hardly up to the comedy and the songs which have been given her.”⁵³

This was heartbreaking for Lenya, who wished to succeed on the American stage. From this time until 1949 when Lenya virtually retired from the stage, Weill was becoming increasingly ill, yet still solidly continued to work while Lenya cared for him. On the afternoon of 3 April 1949, Weill died aged fifty. Lenya has recalled her last moments with Weill when he had asked her, “Lenya, do you really love me?” she held his hand and replied, “Only you.”⁵⁴ These last words from Weill are testament to the type of relationship the couple had, and raises questions of what Weill really felt about their relationship. If he had these doubts all along why was it only on his death bed he aired them? Was Lenya the victim in society's mores or the benefactress? It also bears testimony to how Lenya actually felt about Weill. Her understanding that she could never really know him also tells a lot for her human understanding. She may have felt differently about Weill in the early days of their relationship, but we cannot ascertain this for certain. There is truth in this statement, endorsed by her correspondence after he died which bears testimony to a deep grief which proves Lenya did, in the end, truly love Weill.

⁵³ p. 170.

⁵⁴ p. 178.

2.5 Conclusions

The relationship of Weill and Lenya has been described as complex, unconventional and not within the constraints of societal norms. They were co-dependent, and relied on each other for emotional, physical, artistic and physiological stability. Weill provided Lenya with the companionship that suited her flamboyant lifestyle, he also provided her with artistic opportunity and expression, helping her become the actress she wanted and needed to be, within any boundaries she requested. In turn Lenya provided Weill with the solidarity he needed as a composer, he would spend hours or even days working on a composition wishing not to be disturbed, and Lenya understood this. Lenya and her sheer presence provided Weill with a sense of happiness and humor, she was the light in his hectic and fast-paced life, and was there to help him when he needed it.

“ It’s been five weeks now since Kurt passed away and I haven’t been able to take one step forward. The only thing that keeps me going at all is his music, and the only desire I still remain.”⁵⁵

The pair co-existed together, performer and composer, husband and wife, artist and collaborator. They were an unlikely couple to others but together found a way to co-exist in each other’s artistic lives. Throughout their lives both Lenya and Weill shared a mutual appreciation for each other’s artistic abilities and commitments. Weill was, for all intents and purposes, the creator and Lenya was somewhat the product of his creations. Without Weill she would not have had such success in her career and without Lenya there to inspire him Weill would not have excelled as much as he did in his music writing. I believe this is true in that Lenya provided Weill with a muse, a focus and a determination to create this type of music. I cannot say for certain, of course, whether

⁵⁵ Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, p. 484.

he would have been so successful in this genre, but without Lenya we do not know what path Weill would have taken or if his interests would have rested in another direction. Weill was constantly seeking to help Lenya excel on the stage, while still seeking to break boundaries with Brecht in German theatre.

Chapter 3 Lenya: The Leading Lady

3.1 The Star of the Show

Lenya's time on the stage was largely centered in roles of a similar nature; that of a prostitute, a maid or a lowly regarded female character. Regardless of the role Lenya shone in all of her performances on stage, with the performance reviews at the time reflecting her success. In between performances of the *Threepenny Opera*, in 1927 Lenya took part in Lion Feuchtwanger's play about the international oil trade, *Die Petroleuminseln* (The Oil Islands), at the Berlin State Theatre. Weill wrote a fox trot for it and Lenya played the role of Miss Charmian Peruchacha. Some had their doubts about Feuchtwanger choosing Lenya for this role, but most were presently surprised. Critic Monty Jacobs wrote in the *Vossische Zeitung*:

Fehling [director] took a risk when he chose Lotte Lenya, who had recently been discovered as a talented artist in *The Threepenny Opera*, but he converted the doubters . . . She was exciting in an exotic way, and she was the best contrast to the character of Deborah Gray through her style and the high spirits of her temperament.⁵⁶

Other critics also agreed with Jacobs, with Ludwig Sternaux another Berlin critic writing:

Lotte Lenya brings to the role her interesting profile as well as her exotic gracefulness, her hot temperament as well as the metallic sharpness of her youthful, bright voice.⁵⁷

Lenya made an impact with audiences in all of her stage roles, bringing something unique to her character. In April 1932 a Viennese version of *Mahagonny* took place, again Lenya was praised for her performance. Robert Konta wrote in the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* about Lenya's performance:

⁵⁶ Donald Spoto, *Lenya: A Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), pp. 87-88.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 88.

The most captivating in the production. How terribly difficult it must be to play a ravaged prostitute from nowhere in a desolate desert. [...] She also sings – sweetly, but also bitterly, and in a voice that couldn't exist on a normal opera stage.⁵⁸

For the same performance another critic in *Das interessante Blatt* described Lenya as being 'the star of the whole evening'. This chapter will look at some of the roles Lenya has played and specifically at some particular songs she has performed. The first will be the 'Alabama Song' from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, 1930). The second, 'Pirate Jenny' from *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera, 1927), and *Nannas Lied*, a 1939 Brechtian setting. In considering these works I will examine the correlation between the characters Lenya plays and the connection to her life and past these characters signify. I also wish to examine the libretti of each of these songs, closely exploring the relationship between the music and the text. The significance of these texts to the music not only bears importance to the portrayal of Lenya's character but also reflects societies ideology and cultural norms at this time.

3.2 'Alabama Song' - Jessie & Bessie

German theatre in the 1920s incorporated many aspects of everyday life in Germany, however it also took influences from outside of Europe, with regards to culture, lifestyle, and music. The Weill-Brecht opera, the *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, describes life in an imaginary, quasi-American boomtown. Brecht has described the opera as paying conscious tribute to the senselessness of the operatic form:

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 105.

The intention was that a certain unreality, irrationality and lack of seriousness should be introduced at the right moment, and so strike with a double meaning.⁵⁹

In saying this Brecht is describing his intentions for the opera to be that of pleasure and enjoyment not only as the form but also as subject matter. Both Brecht and Weill held this view; they sought to discover a new function for music in the theatre.

The ‘Alabama Song’ or as it is also known ‘Moon of Alabama’ is sung by the character Jessie a prostitute, played by Lenya, who, along with six other women, wave goodbye to their homes and set out in pursuit of a paradise city in search of whiskey, money and men.⁶⁰ The song is always performed in English, even when the rest of the opera is performed in its original German. The musical structure incorporates aspects of ragtime, jazz and also formal counterpoint. The two main characters, Jessie and Bessie, sing of their longing to find the nearest whiskey bar. The desire of these women would not have been heard of in regular society, creating a discord in societal expectations versus reality. In reality this type of yearning was commonplace but was not seen as an accepted social norm, instead this aspect of society was portrayed on stage in a more provocative, theatrical, ‘accepted’ way. Such themes are amplified by the accompanying music, with the disdainful difference between a little three-note motif and the accompaniment that pulses repeatedly beneath it.⁶¹ The accompaniment is rich in fourths with semitonal slides between the notes, as seen in Example 3.1 below.

⁵⁹ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and Translated by John Willet (Great Britain: Methuen & Co., 1964), p.36.

⁶⁰ Spoto, pp. 94-96.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 108.

1, 2. Oh show us the way to the

next whis - ky bar. Oh don't ask why, oh don't ask
(2.) lit - tle dol - lar.

Example 3.1, 'Alabama Song' from *Mahagonny*, Bars 1-10.⁶²

After a self-pitying mood, their hope for this new paradise city is then transferred into the burlesque dance-music lamentation of the 'Alabama Song', this time with a semi-tonal movement quietly heard in the inner part, as seen in Example 2.2 below.

⁶² Ronald Taylor, *Kurt Weill: Composer in a Divided World* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 109.

Example 3.2, 'Alabama Song' from *Mahagonny*, Bars 25-32.⁶³

Lenya's role as Jenny shows a precise combination of musical-theatrical sensibility and a slight wildness in her character that is evident in all Lenya's performances. In December 1928 Theodor Adorno wrote about *Mahagonny*:

The bourgeois world is represented as already moribund in its moment of twilight, and it is demolished in scandal as its past catches up with it.⁶⁴

Adorno's view of the bourgeois society illustrates the attitudes and ideals of the 1920s and the place in which women fell within society. In this 'paradise city' women were viewed as materialistic and seen here as a status below men in society. What at first glance seemed to be a wonderful city full of success and happiness was soon found to be a false utopia, disappointment spread and the people once again went in search for their ideal paradise.

⁶³ Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, 'Alabama Song' from *Mahagonny* (Universal Edition, 1928)

⁶⁴ Spoto, p. 102.

3.3 An Anthem of the Dissolute

In examining both the lyrics and the accompanying music we can discover how the music holds meaning created from the text. As Laurence Kramer writes:

Musical representation has significant, definite, interpretively rich ties to both musical process and to cultural process [...] both the creating word and the created world come to be represented as forms of music.⁶⁵

Musical tropes are created in the music to represent for example a certain character, mood or atmosphere in a song. Likewise this is seen in the ‘Alabama Song’ where a mixed atmosphere is created. The opening section depicts the women in an anxious state searching for the nearest whiskey bar, the following section flows into a smooth melody with the women saying their goodbyes to the ‘moon of Alabama’. This use of juxtaposition of harmonies and textures within the song could not be achieved by the text alone. The music becomes representational of social, cultural and physical reality through this process. The opening harmony is represented with dissonant chords in a striking manner by the piano part, with the vocal line matching this rugged, detached style, as seen in the following example:

The image shows a musical score for the 'Alabama Song' from the opera Mahagonny. It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef and has the following lyrics: 'next (2.) lit - tle bar. dol - lar. Oh don't ask why, oh don't ask'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef and features a complex, dissonant harmonic structure with a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 3.3, ‘Alabama Song’ from *Mahagonny*, Bars 5-9.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Laurence Kramer, ‘Music and Representation: The Instance of Haydn’s *Creation*’ in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* ed. by Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 139-162.

⁶⁶ Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, ‘Alabama Song’ from *Mahagonny* (Universal Edition, 1928)

The Alabama Song was an anthem of the dissolute; a cry for base pleasures, and a longing of fulfillment. Lenya's nonoperatic voice was enchanting to audiences, it could be smoky and inviting or full of childhood innocence. Lenya gave a stylistic focus to the work, as she did with her other works, which gripped audiences in a way they could relate to on a mutual level of human feeling and compassion.

3.4 'Pirate Jenny' – *Die Dreigroschenoper*

The second song 'Pirate Jenny' from the *Threepenny Opera*, tells of a poor girl Jenny who works in a London dive, dreaming of vengeance against those who exploited her. One day, she sings, a ship with eight sails and fifty canons will appear in the harbour and destroy the entire town except for her hotel.⁶⁷ She will sail away, the darling of her vindicating pirates:

And the ship with eight sails

And with fifty cannons loaded

Will lay siege to the town.

Lenya's voice is that of a strong singing actress, a unique presence impossible to confuse with any other singing actress. Her character is both soiled and dangerous, but Lenya makes Jenny human and credible. Donald Spoto writes in his book, *Lenya: A Life*, about Lenya's personality and her off stage persona. He describes the role she played as Jenny as contrasting with her swaggering confidence, and that perhaps only Lenya, whose personal experience sometimes resembled Jenny's, could have drawn so frightening and touching yet so tender a portrait of lost innocence.⁶⁸ "Give that guy my regards" Jenny replies to someone who accused her of being a lady, and she turns up her hip, as if offering it for a kiss. Lenya's hard personality on stage and enlightening

⁶⁷ Spoto, p. 86.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 99.

persona describes that of a woman who wants to break with tradition, no longer being a ‘regular’ polite lady, but to break gender stereotypes and reflect a woman who is confident and could destroy a whole town.

Lenya’s portrayal of Jenny was set with a striking tone in her voice, harsh yet distinctive. Jenny’s swearing to seek vengeance is met with a sudden swooping glissando effect on the last word of ‘harbor’, italicizing both loneliness and menace on her wish for the pirates to come and take her away. When she then draws on the verbal image of a ship “with a skull on its mast”, the ‘skull’ is given a deadly hollowness of tone.

grin?"
now?"
hair.

And a ship,
And the ship,
And the ship,

a black freight - er,
the black freight - er,
the black freight - er,

with a
turns a -
runs the

skull on its mast - head will be com - in' in.
round in the har - bor, shoot-in' guns from the bow!
flag up its mast - head and a cheer rings the air!

Example 3.4, ‘Pirate Jenny’ from *The Threepenny Opera*, Bars 22-27.⁶⁹

“Nobody gonna sleep here – tonight”, she promises half singing, half speaking, perfect for a character shorn of pity that the merest crack in her voice suggests not so much her

⁶⁹ Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, ‘Pirate Jenny’ from *The Threepenny Opera* (Vienna and Berlin: Universal Edition, 1928)

age, more as the effects on the character of too many brutal years.⁷⁰ By the end of the song Lenya sings of the ship that, ‘sails out to sea, and on it me’, the last word is spun out with a thin vibrato, full of a tragic triumph.

"That 'll learn you!" Then a ship, the black freight - er, dis - ap -

pears out to sea, _____ and on it is me.

Example 3.5, ‘Pirate Jenny’ from *The Threepenny Opera*, Bars 49- 54.⁷¹

3.5 Art for Consumption: Art to the People

Looking again in reference to Kramer, we can view this song, and song in general, from the standpoint as mimetic of the text, a kind of translation of it, enhancing and increasing our understanding of the text.⁷² To take this on board we must also grasp the standpoint and view the librettist had when writing this text. In the 1920s Brecht was

⁷⁰ Spoto, pp. 207- 208.

⁷¹ Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, ‘Pirate Jenny’ from *The Threepenny Opera* (Vienna and Berlin: Universal Edition, 1928)

⁷² Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 126.

at a pivotal point in his career at which point a fundamental shift in his writing can be seen. He abandoned the anarchistic nihilism of his earlier plays in favour of behaviorist materialism, adopting a fully-fledged Marxist position as the Weimar Republic reached its end.⁷³ Even with a catastrophic economic crisis the Weimar Republic had a powerful slogan: *Art to the People*. The German people had a huge interest in art and literature, with large attendances from the theatre-going public. Brecht's writing at this time described the people's feelings and attacked their enemies, who were now marching openly under Adolf Hitler's swastika.

In relation to *Pirate Jenny*, this song has strong connotations to the social and cultural environment in which it was written. This lowly prostitute in search of her vengeance on her enemies imagined so far that she envisioned pirates appearing in the shore and taking down the whole town.

But I'm countin' your heads
While I make up the beds
'Cuz there's nobody gonna sleep here
Tonight, none of you will sleep here.

The text and song unify to create an atmosphere of yearning and revenge, echoing the feeling and thoughts of the people of the Weimar Republic. This fusion of word and music creates the attack needed to portray meaning that can be interpreted by audiences in a way they can relate to.

3.6 Nannas Lied – A Past to be Forgotten

Brecht's view is that of a Marxist and can clearly be seen throughout his work. When it comes to the representation of women in his writing a stereotypical image is seen.

⁷³ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics* ed. by Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles, Translations by Laura Bradley, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn (Frankfurt: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 2003), p. 57.

Sara Lennox, discusses Brecht and his portrayal of women in his writings. She believes unbeknownst to Brecht, and contrary to his conscious intentions, women in his work exert a subversive potential. Brecht's women figures demonstrate both his blindness to women themselves and to a whole range of issues which women have been taken to represent.⁷⁴ The women he depicts generally respond positively to brutal treatment on the part of their men, though this is obviously not the case with Pirate Jenny needless to say. In the case of Nannas Lied a similar view of women can be seen in the life of a prostitute. *Nannas Lied* was composed in 1939, it depicts a prostitute making sense out of her life with the jaded attitude of the underprivileged. The text describes the feelings of Nanna, who has been 'on the love market' for years and regrets that with age her feelings have become old and blunted. Weill set the text as a Christmas present for Lenya. Although she never performed this song in public she did sing it privately for Weill who described her delivery as 'absolutely unforgettable'.⁷⁵ This song is typical of the roles Lenya played in her time on stage, even with this work never making it to the theatre. The lyrics were previously part of Brecht's 1936 play, *Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe*, (Round Heads and Pointed Heads), and in that same year it had been set to music by Hanns Eisler.

3.7 A Text of Bourgeois Realism

The text here again bears significant value in terms of social views and Brecht's view of women. Weill's setting of the text emphasizes Nanna's sorrowful feelings towards life and love. With a drifting repeated piano part and the half-spoken, half-sung vocal line, the music succeeds in portraying the dissatisfaction Nanna feels with her past. In

⁷⁴ Sara Lennox, 'Women in Brecht's Works', *New German Critique* No. 14 (Spring, 1978), pp. 83-96.

⁷⁵ Spoto, p. 144.

this text Brecht represents a culminate view seen at this time of bourgeois realism, which bears the question: are these characters a mirror of existing reality? Or are they actually challenging for a transformation of this reality? Brecht reiterates again and again that his theatre is intended to show the world as changing and changeable.⁷⁶ The song in particular shows a transience and reflection on life, a life that has changed over time and upon reflection is not how Nanna wished it to be. This character of Nanna, although never performed by Lenya, is very similar in nature to that of her previous roles. Again here it can be said that this character holds connotations to Lenya's personal life and could signify a longing for a changed past.

The cabaret style accompaniment of the chorus section amplifies the characters memories of the past as she tells her audience, ending each with a spoken line of text justifying her past actions:

The musical score for 'Nannas Lied' (bars 35-38) is presented in G minor (two flats) and 4/4 time. The vocal line begins with a half note 'des.' followed by a spoken line '(Schließlich bleibt man ja nicht immer siebzehn.)' and then a melodic phrase 'Gott sei dank geht al-les schnell vor'. The piano accompaniment starts with a 'des.' chord, followed by a series of chords and a melodic line in the right hand, and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include 'a tempo', 'mf', 'espress.', and 'p'.

Example 3.6, *Nannas Lied*, Bars 35-38.⁷⁷

The refrain then in a flowing melody with spread chords is presented in the form of questions Nanna is asking. These spread chords a representational of the feelings of regret she has about her life, the feeling of melancholy nostalgia:

⁷⁶ Lennox, p. 90.

⁷⁷ Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, 'Nanna's Lied' (USA: Brookhouse Music Inc., 1957)

gar. Wo sind die Trä - nen von ge - stern a - bend? Wo ist der
 Schnee vom ver - gan - ge - nen Jahr? Wo sind die Trä - nen von ge - stern

Example 3.7, *Nannas Lied* Bars 16-21.⁷⁸

In juxtaposing the spoken word to the melody it creates a sense of atmosphere necessary in depicting the tone, and meaning of this song. The image of a woman looking back on her life and wondering where it went, but yet still thanking god it went by so quick, as if glad those bad times are gone.

3.8 The Stigmatized Character

Russell Campbell speaks about prostitution and the female protagonist in his book, *Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema*. Campbell writes about the

⁷⁸ Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, 'Nanna's Lied' (USA: Brookhouse Music Inc., 1957)

prostitute character who is assumed as an ‘outlaw’ or ‘rebel’ and does not internalize the shame that polite society heaps upon her, she is hardened to a life on the margins by contemptuous conventional standards.⁷⁹ Campbell also talks about how in their work place of the brothel where prostitutes not only work but also live, is recognized as a site of solidarity with other stigmatized women and a place where weaknesses and hypocrisies of the male power brokers in society are exposed.⁸⁰ Campbell writes specifically about the character of the prostitute in the *Threepenny Opera* in relation to the portrayal of a class divided capitalist society. He regards the character of Jenny as a good person at heart, that suffers a momentary weakness, rather than a bad person whose mercenary motives result in contemptible betrayal of others, in all cases the prostitute as the companion to the man on the wrong side of the law. In this way automatically linking the female prostitute character to the male ‘outlawed’ character.

The character Lenya portrayed in each of her roles over the years also reflected a sense of how her own life stood. Lenya, as a child prostitute could relate to the characters she played in these roles and added a unique element no other actress could, an element of personal experience. Her representation of gender on stage portrayed an aspect of society that was not seen by the everyday German citizen, in Europe or abroad for that matter. Thus, the staging of the female protagonist was created on the basic attitudes of societal expectations and views, portraying women in a way that was not the norm of the untainted, ‘proper’ women of society.

⁷⁹ Russell Campbell, ‘Comrade’ in, *Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 81-103.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 92.

3.9 Conclusions

This aspect of gender difference can be seen in all of the songs discussed, the female protagonist is linked directly to her male counterpart. In ‘Alabama Song’, the female character is in search of men, money and whiskey, and similarly in ‘Pirate Jenny’, the prostitute Jenny is directly linked to the male characters in the hotel in which she works. In Nannas Lied her character is reminiscing on her life as a prostitute, thanking god that period in her life has passed.

This staging of gender has primarily been associated with the male ‘natural’ character and the female as a secondary subject, conformed to a hierarchical binary order. The theme of prostitution in theatre goes beyond this binary role. Even with this power struggle between the two, the role of the prostitute sheds a new light on this binary order. Lenya’s portrayal of the prostitute character lies deeper than the characteristic gender portrayals on stage. Lenya with the work of both Brecht and Weill, combines personal experience and a charismatic persona to the stage to represent this gender imbalance. The collaboration of Brecht and Weill in the 1920s pushed the social theatrical boundaries and sought to deliver a new idea to audiences about popular theatre. They sought to provide a socially aware musical theatre, which took the best from opera and theatre and transform them into a dynamic and balanced whole. All three of them and their new take on musical theatre breaking societal norms, helped shake up German theatre, with Lenya at the forefront critiquing societal attitudes towards women in her performances.

In looking at her roles in such works as *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *The Threepenny Opera*, you can see how these roles could have shaped her artistic creation and interpretation of the work of both Weill and Brecht. In the examples I have discussed the female prostitute is sexualized on stage and her character is specifically

written in this way. In Brecht's writing we can see the character of Jenny longing for her release from her male dominated world. Societies ideology carried an expectation of women, who were traditionally portrayed in a non-threatening way on stage and needed to portray a certain image to meet societies standards. Women were seen as proper, elegant and in the shadow of their male counterpart. These realities of society seen on stage were not discussed by the regular upper class German citizens, and were therefore distorted on stage as a theatrical occurrence for the theatregoer. In reality this was not the case, these women worked as prostitutes to make a living for themselves and their family, there was nothing whimsical about it. There is a sense in 'Pirate Jenny', of her character seeking to transcend social expectations, showing massive strength from her to take on the whole town- perhaps a metaphor of Jenny taking on all societal expectations and ideals, and breaking down gender barriers in search of freedom and social change, where the female emerges triumphant in society.

Conclusion

German theatre in the 1920's engaged with attitudes towards class, gender, and politics, representing the modern cosmopolitan life in Germany at this time. This thesis sheds a new light on the ideals of German culture and how they were truly represented on the theatre stage. On the basis of this examination into the selected works of Weill and Brecht, played by Lenya, it is evident that the female protagonist in each of the works is sexualized. Within each of these works the viewpoint is strongly seen, as the leading female figure in each case is the character of a prostitute. This character is portrayed in a negative light towards their male counterpart, depicting their life as gloomy, isolated, and destined for failure. These women were represented as a figure of bourgeois faddishness, socially understood and accepted in this way by German society and theatregoers.

This thesis has examined selected roles Lenya played between 1910-1940, on which Weill and Brecht collaborated. A large body of work was produced at this time for the theatre that was shaped, for the most part, by the modernization of western culture. The works produced demonstrated the continual change in societal attitudes towards social issues such as gender, sexuality and mainstream politics. The works selected for examination in this thesis were chosen on the basis of their representation of the female protagonist from the diverse styles and perspectives evident in the musical, sociological and cultural life of Germany in the 1920s. In doing so, focusing on the work of Lenya, with her personal related past and the libretti of Brecht, made for an interesting portrayal of the prostitute character across German literature and theatre in the 1920s.

4.1 Art as Communication: Culturally Driven Libretti

The purpose of this thesis was to look at the role of the prostitute character from the point of view of the roles Lenya played in each of the selected works. In doing this I was able to consider the social and political climate at this time and draw comparisons on how the female character was portrayed on stage and the realities of the lives of these women, in contrast to the realities of the lives most women had in the everyday German society.

In firstly looking at the libretti of Brecht, I was able to discern the attitudes and ideals he held towards women and German society. With Brecht's ideas on 'Epic Theatre' and a need for politicized drama, we can gather a great deal from his writings on his attitudes towards women on stage and also the effect and results this had when working with Weill and Lenya. Brecht's belief at this time was that there needed to be a drama that demonstrated how the world could and must be changed – representing art as communication. He was conscious of the social function of music within society and with Weill's powerful music, combined with the cynicism and social criticism of Brecht's libretto, they created important cultural creations depicting social change during the inter-war period. The importance of Brecht to this research comes not only from his strong culturally driven libretti, but also from the importance he placed to both the music and the text. As John Willett describes:

Music [...] becomes a kind of punctuation, an underlining of the words, a well-aimed comment giving the gist of the action or the text. And this remains its prime function in all Brecht's plays.⁸¹

Brecht's importance placed on both the music and text provides a deeper understanding to both his writing of the text and also to how the text was set to music, and to how the

⁸¹ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (United Kingdom: Methuen Drama, 1959), p. 132.

work was performed. Brecht wanted the audience to be able to relate to what was happening on the stage, on a level of human experience, where mutual empathy and feeling were to be felt. In regards to this aspect it is clear Brecht had a mutual appreciation towards his audiences, but the same cannot be said to that of his co-workers and partners. We know from written evidence Brecht coached Lenya on stage and throughout the work they collaborated on, helping her become more confident on stage. This shows empathy towards her, but was this all for personal gain? Or was this a genuine affection for Lenya as a person? In all of her roles Lenya played the character of a prostitute, in each case this character was written into the story line of the libretti. What does this say about Brecht's attitudes towards women prostitutes? It could be looked at in a positive light as he puts these characters at the centre of each of these works. It could also represent a cultural phenomenon that Brecht is merely portraying on stage as a matter of dismantling cultural normalities. Brecht was constantly seeking to change and modernize drama, continually searching to exceed social norms and tackle social issues. I believe this may be the case in terms of his writing, and Lenya provided him and Weill with a muse and to an extent a collaborator on these works to seek out what where 'social norms' at the time.

4.2 The Non-Traditional Muse

Weill and Lenya held a unique relationship, with periods of separation and divorce, they always stayed in contact with each other. Lenya held a great artistic input into Weill's creative output. Lenya was not only a muse to Weill's work she was also a collaborator. She provided something to Weill that helped him succeed in his musical career. They had a relationship of mutual agreement, Lenya knew that if Weill needed hours on end of solitude that was what she gave him, and Weill knew of Lenya's

difficult past that when she needed time apart or to be with other partners from time to time this was acceptable to him.

I believe it was this reliance on each other that set them apart. Weill constantly wrote music to suit Lenya's voice and helped her land many successful roles in his works. Lenya provided Weill with a partner, collaborator, and muse. Weill constantly wished to succeed and with that he wanted Lenya to succeed with him. The collaborative work of both Weill and Lenya provides us with an insight into the creative minds of both a performer and a composer, and the view of what can be called a 'non-traditional' muse.

4.3 Vulnerability and Defiance

In examining selected works Lenya performed on stage this thesis ensued to uncover the portrayal of the prostitute character not only through the music and text but also through the individual performer. Through the agency of both Brecht and Weill, I believe Lenya was able to critique societal attitudes towards women in her performances. She was an essential link in the portrayal of the female prostitute character, an aspect of the bourgeois society she was living in, a role which was seen as a fad by regular society. She came to represent all that was bright, glittering, sharp and trenchant about the art of theatre.

Both her vulnerability and defiance were key characteristics of her personality and her characters on stage. Lenya projected an individuality a vulnerability and a defiance on stage, that her successors found hard to match. Lenya was unique and her past history helped her succeed on stage, enabling her to stand out from other performers, and shape her artistic creation and interpretation of the roles she played.

Lenya's portrayal of the theme of prostitution was a key aspect in conveying the storyline of each of these works. In 'Alabama Song' from the *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* the character Jessie is singing of her longing of a paradise city. From this we can view this need for a new city and new opportunities in line with the ideals both Weill and Brecht were trying to depict. In this way the character of the prostitute is at the foreground, pushing both theatrical boundaries and social expectations. Similarly in Lenya's role as Jenny in the *Threepenny Opera*, with her song 'Pirate Jenny' the prostitute sings of her longing to leave the dissolute town in search for brighter opportunities and a happier life. In both of these roles Lenya is representing a dual character. Her durable personality on stage and illuminating persona describes that of a woman who wants to break with tradition, no longer a representative of 'regular' contemporary women, but to break gender and societal stereotypes and signify a woman who is confident and capable of destroy a whole town.

4.4 Societal Expectations

From a general standpoint from the works discussed in this thesis, we can see a pattern of how the female character is portrayed as a sexualized figure on stage. As seen from these works there is a gender imbalance seen between the characters, one of a binary hierarchy between the male and female characters. This binary hierarchy is representative of the realities of German society in the 1920s. I believe in examining these songs in particular you can see how these societal expectations are being challenged in these works. In *Nannas Lied* we can see from Brecht's text how he represents a culminate view seen at this time of bourgeois realism. This transience and reflection of life Nanna has can be echoed in the realisms and expectations of German society.

In the case of each character the female prostitute is stigmatized, and left no better off by the end of the work. This leads us to question the effectiveness of these works in representing a realistic portrayal of German women in society. The theme of prostitution was prevalent in theatrical works of the time, in each case the female character is sexualized and portrayed within a negative environment. Completing this thesis it has opened up a dialogue that needs to materialize in scholarly research today. There is much research on the female character and the binary hierarchy between male and female roles, but there is very little on the sexualized female prostitute character. I believe the characters Lenya plays brings to light these issues and puts them in a positive light – a position of power, a power to stand up to societal expectations and shed light on the stigmatized female characters. It may be that these character do not emerge triumphant in the end of their respective works, yet they still standing up to their male counterparts and up against societal expectations. Little by little pushing the boundaries of theatre, writing, and to cultural norms.

4.5 Conclusion

Within the scope of this thesis, it has been possible only to offer a mere portion of the possible works to examine in relation to this theme. The music created by that of Weill and Brecht, is one of extraordinary musical premise, and holds a great deal of insight beyond just that of music and text. Their work, coupled with that of Lenya's impeccable performances, gives for an insightful exploration of the theme of prostitution, societal expectations, and the boundaries of musical theatre. A fitting conclusion to this thesis is to recall the words of Brecht himself on theatre, his words encapsulating what theatre should represent and how audiences should conceive it:

It is not enough to demand insight and informative images of reality from the theater. Our theater must stimulate a desire for understanding, a delight in changing reality. Our audience must experience not only the ways to free Prometheus, but be schooled in the very desire to free him. Theater must teach all the pleasures and joys of discovery, all the feelings of triumph associated with liberation.⁸²

⁸² Bertolt Brecht, *On Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* ed. and Translated by John Willet (Great Britain: Methuen & Co., 1964), pp. 179-180.

Appendix 1:
Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, 'Alabama Song' from *Mahagonny*
(Vienna and Berlin: Universal Edition, 1928)

44

Alabama Song

(From "THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CITY OF MAHAGONNY")

Written by BERT BRECHT
and KURT WEILL

Moderato assai (♩ = 69)

The musical score consists of three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is Moderato assai with a quarter note equal to 69 beats per minute. The piano accompaniment is marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The lyrics are: "1,2. Oh show us the way to the next (2.) {whis-ky bar. dol-lar} lit-tle Oh don't ask why, oh don't ask why For we must find the next {whis-ky bar, dol-lar,} lit-tle for if".

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we don't find the next {whis - ky bar, lit - tle dol - lar,} I tell you we must die! I

tell you we must die! I tell you, I tell you, I tell you we must

die! Oh! Moon

of A - la - ba ma we now

Valse

p

— must say good - bye. We've lost —

The first system consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "— must say good - bye. We've lost —".

— our good old mam ma and must have

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "— our good old mam ma and must have".

{ whis - ky } oh you know why. Oh! Moon —
 { dot - iars }

The third system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "{ whis - ky } oh you know why. Oh! Moon —" and "{ dot - iars }". The piano part includes dynamic markings *p* and *pp*.

— of A - la - ba - ma we now —

The fourth system concludes the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "— of A - la - ba - ma we now —".

— must say good - bye. ————— We've lost

our good old ma - ma and must have

whis - ky, oh you know why. and must have

(D.C.)

dol - lars oh you know why.

pp *sempre*

Appendix 2:
 Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, 'Pirate Jenny' from *The Threepenny Opera*
 (Vienna and Berlin: Universal Edition, 1928)

230

PIRATE JENNY
 from *The Threepenny Opera*

English Words by MARC BLITZSTEIN
 Original German Words by BERT BRECHT
 Music by KURT WEILL

Allegretto (♩ = 92)

The musical score consists of three systems. Each system includes a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 92 beats per minute. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The lyrics are as follows:

You gen - tle - men can watch while I'm
 You gen - tle - men can say, "Hey girl
 Then you gen - tle - men can wipe off the

scrub - bin' the floors, and I'm scrub - bin' the floors while you're
 fin - ish the floors, get up - stairs, make the beds, earn your
 laugh from you face, ev - 'ry build - in' in town is a

gawk - in', and may - be once you tip me and it
 keep here!" You toss me your tips and look
 flat one. Your whole stink - in' place will be

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makes you feel swell, on a rat - ty wa - ter - front in a
 out at the ships; but I'm count - in' your heads while I
 down to the ground, on - ly this cheap ho - tel stand - in'

rat - ty old ho - tel, and you nev - er guess to who you're
 make up the beds 'cause there's no - bod - y gon - na
 up safe and sound, and you yell, "Why the hell spare

talk - in', and you nev - er guess to who you're talk - in'.
 sleep here. To - night none of you will sleep here.
 that one?" And you yell, "Why the hell spare that one?"

pp *sf*

pp

Sud - den - ly one night, there's a scream in the night, and you
 Then that night there's a bang in the night, and you
 All the night through with the noise and to - do, you

pp

yell, "What the hell could that a - been?" And you
 yell, "Who's that kick - in' up a row?" And you
 won - der who's that per - son lives up there. Then you

see me kind - a grin - nin' while I'm scrub - bin'. And you say "What the hell's she got to
 see me kind - a star - in' out the win - da. And you say "What's she got to stare at
 see me step - pin' out in - to the morn - ing, look - in' nice with a rib - bon in my

grin?" And a ship, a black freight-er, with a
 now?" And the ship, the black freight-er, turns a -
 hair. And the ship, the black freight-er, runs the

skull on its mast - head will be com - in' in. air!
 around in the har - bor, shoot - in' guns from the bow!
 flag up its mast - head and a cheer rings the

Meno mosso (like a slow march)

By noon - time the dock is all

swarm - in' with men, com - in' off of that ghost - ly freight - er. They're

mov - in' in the shad - ows where no one can see, and they're

chain - in' up peo - ple and bring - in' them to me, ask - in'

me, "Kill them now or lat - er?" Ask - in' me, "Kill them now or

pp *pp* *rit.*

Slowly

lat - er?" Noon by the clock and so still on the dock, you can

p *p*

Appendix 3:
 Kurt, Weill, and Bertolt Brecht, 'Nanna's Lied'
 (USA: Brookhouse Music Inc., 1957)

Nanna's Lied
 (1939)

1

Words by
 Bertolt Brecht

Music by
 Kurt Weill

Moderato assai (♩ = 116) *mf*

1. Mei-ne Her-ren, mit sieb-zehn Jah-ren kam ich
 2. geht man mit den Jah-ren leich-ter

sempre legato *mf* *p*

auf den Lie-bes-markt und ich ha-be viel er-
 auf den Lie-bes-markt und um-armt sie dort in

fah-ren. Bö-ses gab es viel doch das war das Spiel. A-ber
 Scha-ren. A-ber das Ge-fühl wird er staun-lich kühl wenn man

poco rall. *a tempo* *mf*
 man-ches hab ich doch ver-argt. (Spoken) (Schließlich bin ich ja auch ein Mensch.) 1,2 Gott sei
 da-mit all-zu-we-nig kargt. (Spoken) (Schließlich geht ja jeder Vorrat zu Ende.)

espr.

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Dank geht al - les schnell vor - ü - ber auch die Lie - be und der Kum - mer so -

p

p *rall.* *a tempo*

gar. Wo sind die Trä - nen von ge - stern a - bend? Wo ist der

cresc.

rall. *a tempo*

Schnee vom ver - gan - ge - nen Jahr? Wo sind die Trä - nen von ge - stern

mp *p sub.*

rall. *a tempo*

a - bend? Wo ist der Schnee vom ver - gan - ge - nen Jahr? 2. Frei - lich

p

2. *mf*

Jahr 3. Und auch wenn man gut das Han-deln lern-te auf der Lie - bes -

mess': Lust in Klein - geld zu ver - wan - deln wird doch

poco rall.

nie-mals leicht. Nun, es wird er-reicht. Doch man wird auch äl - ter un - ter -

a tempo *mf*

des. (Spoken) (Schließlich bleibt man ja nicht immer siebzehn.) Gott sei dank geht al - les schnell vor-

espr. *p*

ü - ber, auch die Lie - be und der Kum - mer so - gar. _____ Wo sind die

f

mf

Trä - nen von ge - stern a - bend? Wo ist der Schnee _____ vom ver - gan - ge - nen

p

p

Jahr? Wo sind die Trä - nen von ge - stern a - bend? Wo ist der

p

rit.

a tempo *morendo*

Schnee _____ vom ver - gan - ge - nen Jahr? _____

ppp

Appendix 4:
'Alabama Song' (Original English)

Oh, show us the way to the next whiskey bar!
Oh don't ask why,
Oh don't ask why!
For we must find the next whiskey bar
For if we don't find the next whiskey bar,
I tell you we must die!

Oh moon of Alabama
It's time to say goodbye
We've lost our good old mamma
And must have whiskey
Oh, you know why.

Oh show us the way to the next pretty boy!
Oh don't ask why
Oh, don't ask why!
For we must find the next pretty boy
For if we don't find the next pretty boy
I tell you we must die!

Oh moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye
We've lost our good old mama
And must have boys
Oh, you know why.

Oh show us the way to the next little dollar!
Oh don't ask why,
oh don't ask why!
For we must find the next little dollar
For if we don't find the next little dollar
I tell you we must die!

Oh moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye
We've lost our good old mama
And must have dollars
Oh, you know why.

Appendix 5: 'Pirate Jenny'

Meine Herren, heute sehen Sie mich Gläser abwaschen
Und ich mache das Bett für jeden.
Und Sie geben mir einen Penny und ich bedanke mich schnell
Und Sie sehen meine Lumpen und dies lumpige Hotel
Und Sie wissen nicht, mit wem Sie reden.
Aber eines Abends wird ein Geschrei sein am Hafen
Und man fragt: Was ist das für ein Geschrei?
Und man wird mich lächeln sehn bei meinen Gläsern
Und man sagt: Was lächelt die dabei?

Und ein Schiff mit acht Segeln
Und mit fünfzig Kanonen
Wird liegen am Kai.

Man sagt: Geh, wisch deine Gläser, mein Kind
Und man reicht mir den Penny hin.
Und der Penny wird genommen, und das Bett wird gemacht!
(Es wird keiner mehr drin schlafen in dieser Nacht.)
Und sie wissen immer noch nicht, wer ich bin.
Aber eines Abends wird ein Getös sein am Hafen
Und man fragt: Was ist das für ein Getös?
Und man wird mich stehen sehen hinterm Fenster
Und man sagt: Was lächelt die so böse?

Und das Schiff mit acht Segeln
Und mit fünfzig Kanonen
Wird beschiessen die Stadt.

Meine Herren, da wird ihr Lachen aufhören
Denn die Mauern werden fallen hin
Und die Stadt wird gemacht dem Erdboden gleich.
Nur ein lumpiges Hotel wird verschont von dem Streich
Und man fragt: Wer wohnt Besonderer darin?
Und in dieser Nacht wird ein Geschrei um das Hotel sein
Und man fragt: Warum wird das Hotel verschont?
Und man wird mich sehen treten aus der Tür am Morgen
Und man sagt: Die hat darin gewohnt?

Und das Schiff mit acht Segeln
Und mit fünfzig Kanonen
Wird beflaggen den Mast.

Und es werden kommen hundert gen Mittag an Land
Und werden in den Schatten treten
Und fangen einen jeglichen aus jeglicher Tür
Und legen ihn in Ketten und bringen vor mir
Und fragen: Welchen sollen wir töten?

Und an diesem Mittag wird es still sein am Hafen
Wenn man fragt, wer wohl sterben muss.
Und dann werden Sie mich sagen hören: Alle!
Und wenn dann der Kopf fällt, sag ich: Hoppla!

Und das Schiff mit acht Segeln
Und mit fünfzig Kanonen
Wird entschwinden mit mir.

English Translation

You gentlemen can watch while I'm scrubbin' the floors,
And I'm scrubbin' the floors while your gawkin'
And maybe once you tip me and it makes you feel swell
On a ratty water front in a ratty old hotel
And you never guess to who you're talkin'
And you never guess to who you're talkin'.

Suddenly one night
There's a scream in the night
And you yell
"What the hell could that a-been?"
And you see me kinda grinnin' while im scrubbin'.
And you say "What the hell's she got to grin?"

And a ship
A black freighter
With a skull on its masthead will be comin' in.

You gentlemen can say
"Hey girl finish the floors,
Get upstairs,
Make the beds
Earn your keep here!"

You toss me your tips and look out at the ships;
But I'm countin' your heads while I make up the beds
Cause there's nobody gonna sleep here
Tonight none of you will sleep here.

Then that night there's a bang in the night
And you yell
"Who's that kickin' up a row?"
And you see me kina starin' out the winda.
And you say "What's she got to stare at now?"

And the ship
The black freighter
Turns around in the harbor
Shootin' guns from the bow!

Then you gentlemen can wipe off the laugh from you face
Ev'ry buildin' in town is a flat one.
Your whole stinkin' place will be down to the ground
Only this cheap hotel standin' up safe and sound
And you yell
"Why the hell spare that one?"
And you yell
"Why the hell spare that one?"

All the night through with the noise and to-do
You wonder who's that person lives up there.
The you see me steppin' out in the morning
Lookin' nice with a ribbon in my hair.

And the ship
The black freighter
Runs the flag up its masthead
And a cheer rings the air!

By noon time the dock is all swarmin' with men
Comin' off of that ghostly freighter.
They're movin' in the shadows where no one can see
And they're chainin' up people and bringin' them to me
Askin' me
"Kill them now or later?"
Askin' me
"Kill them now or later?"

Noon by the clock and so still on the dock
You can hear a fog horn miles away
In that quiet of death
"Right now!"
And they pile up the bodies and I'll say
"That'll learn you!"

Then a ship
The black freighter
Disappears out to sea
And on it is me.

**Appendix 6:
'Nannas Lied'**

<p>Meine Herren, mit siebzehn Jahren Kam Ich auf den Liebesmarkt Und Ich habe viel erfahren Böses gab es viel Doch das war das Spiel Aber manches hab ich doch verargt. (Schließlich bin ich ja auch ein Mensch.)</p>	<p>Dear sirs, with seventeen years I came to the market of love. And I had been through a lot, Bad stuff happens a lot, Indeed, that's the game. But nevertheless, I have some of the blame. (After all, I am a person too.)</p>
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<p>Gott sei Dank geht alles schnell vorüber Auch die Liebe unde der Kummer sogar. Wo sind die Tränen von gestern Abend? Wo ist der Schnee vom vergangenen Jahr? Wo sind die Tränen von gestern Abend? Wo ist der Schnee vom vergangenen Jahr?</p>	<p>Thank God, everything goes by so quickly, Both the love and the even sorrow, as well. Where are the tears of last evening? Where is the snow of yesteryear? Where are the tears of last evening? Where is the snow of yesteryear?</p>
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<p>Freilich geht man mit den Jahren Leichter auf den Liebesmarkt Und umarmt sie dort in Scharen. Aber das Gefühl Bleibt erstaunlich kühl Wenn man damit allzuwenig kargt. (Schließlich geht ja jede Vorrat zu Ende.) (end.)</p>	<p>Of course, as you go through the years, The love market becomes easier, And you embrace them by the score. But your feelings Grow oddly cool, If they're rationed far too little. (After all, any supply has to come to an end.)</p>
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<p>Gott sei Dank geht alles schnell vorüber Auch die Liebe unde der Kummer sogar. Wo sind die Tränen von gestern Abend? Wo ist der Schnee vom vergangenen Jahr? Wo sind die Tränen von gestern Abend? Wo ist der Schnee vom vergangenen Jahr?</p>	<p>Thank God, everything goes by so quickly, Both the love and the even sorrow, as well. Where are the tears of last evening? Where is the snow of yesteryear? Where are the tears of last evening? Where is the snow of yesteryear?</p>
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<p>Und auch wenn man gut das Handeln Lernte auf der Liebesmess': Lust in Kleingeld zu verwandeln Ist doch niemals leicht. Nun, es wird erreicht. Doch man wird auch alter unterdes. (Schließlich bleibt man ja nicht immer siebzehn.) (forever.)</p>	<p>And also, if you have learned the trade well, In the measuring of love: To transform desire into small change, Still is never easy. Now, you'll make it. Meanwhile you become older. (After all, you can't stay seventeen forever.)</p>
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<p>Gott sei Dank geht alles schnell vorüber Auch die Liebe unde der Kummer sogar. Wo sind die Tränen von gestern Abend? Wo ist der Schnee vom vergangenen Jahr? Wo sind die Tränen von gestern Abend? Wo ist der Schnee vom vergangenen Jahr?</p>	<p>Thank God everything goes by so quickly, Both the love and even the sorrow, as well. Where are the tears of last evening? Where is the snow of yesteryear? Where are the tears of last evening? Where is the snow of yesteryear?</p>
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