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Frederic Wood Theatre
Presents

Happy End
By
Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht

Directed by
Arne Zaslove

March 6 - 16
1985
1898 Bertolt Brecht born in Augsburg (Germany); son of wealthy businessman
1904 Enters school of Evangelical Franciscans
1915 Pacifist essay causes disciplinary action
1918 Recruited into army; first play BAAL
1919 Assassination of socialist leaders, among them Rosa Luxembourg; growing sympathy for leftist causes; work as journalist, balladeer; first publications (drama, poetry, prose)
1922 series of successful productions; establishes himself as leading playwright of German language; various literary prizes
1923 Adolf Hitler stages abortive coup d'etat; Brecht on black list of right-wing groups
1924 Hitler writes "Mein Kampf"; Brecht begins systematic study of Marxism; writes A Man's A Man
1929 Stock-market crash; Brecht's Three Penny Opera brings him international recognition; translation of his works into major languages; First performance of Happy End in Berlin
1933 Adolf Hitler comes to power; Brecht's plays banned; his books publicly burned; charged with high treason and stripped of his passport; escapes from Germany; exile in Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark
1939 Outbreak of World War II; Mother Courage
1941 Germany declares war on U.S. Brecht settles in Hollywood; works on films and Galileo; collaboration with Charles Laughton; friendship with Aldous Huxley, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood; above all with Charlie Chaplin
1947 Called before Un-American Activities Committees; decides to leave U.S.; temporary stay in Switzerland
1949 Secures Austrian passport; returns to Germany at the invitation of communist government; settles in East Berlin; founds "Berliner Ensemble"; now primarily works as a director; in the next few years he shapes the "Berliner Ensemble" into the leading theatre troupe of Europe
1956 Uprising in communist Hungary; Brecht dies
KURT WEILL: A CHRONOLOGY

1900 Born in Dessau (Germany)
   His father is the cantor of the local synagogue

1911 Writes music for school plays

1919 Begins study of composition under Humperdinck and Busoni

1922 Chamber music, orchestral pieces, cantatas

1928 Becomes very active in the German 'Cabaret' movement, contributing some of his best known tunes

1929 Premier of his greatest success *Three Penny Opera*

1930 Collaborates with Brecht on *Mahagonny* and *Der Jasager*

1933 Adolf Hitler comes to power; Weill condemned as a Jew and a composer of "decadent" music; by now his songs have become part of the international repertoire;

1935 Forced into exile; settles in U.S.A.

1948 *Down in the Valley*, opera inspired by U.S. folk songs

1949 Broadway musical *Lost in the Stars*

1949 *Street Scene* makes him one of the most popular composers of musical theatre

1950 Dies in New York on April 3rd

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Two Notes on HAPPY END

Happy End is about people in two kinds of shaky employment, gangsterism and Salvationism, both trying to wrest themselves a meal a day out of a society ruled by a closed class of bankers. Neither the thieves nor the believers can do it. In the happy end, whose necessity to us in the audience is caustically insisted upon, they unite to form a bank themselves. Brecht believed that the purpose of drama is to teach us to survive, just as he believed that a man’s stature is shown by what he mourns: as tutors in survival both thugs and Salvationists are hopelessly ill-equipped, and as mourners they are muddled. The thugs have only their guns, and unsteady regrets for a concocted romantic past; the Salvationists cling to a faith that God, “the great cracksman”, will eventually crack the safes of the rich better than any thief. Religion in Happy End is seen as a weapon in the economic war. It is merely less efficient than a gangster’s gun because it is unloaded. Yet its intentions are just as belligerent, and its motives are just as literally hungry.

Penelope Gilliatt (1965)

What is so delightful about Happy End is its youthful, brittle, doubting, tuneful effortlessness. Weill was happiest, I think, when he could be disbelieving. He had always known how to construct a hummable tune. (Hummable? You can’t get the things out of your head.) There are at least two of them in Happy End, the hypnotic “Bilbao Song” and the insinuating “Surabaya Johnny”. The songs function as songs, as mesmerizing rhythms and subtly graceful inflections that can be grasped at first hearing, memorized before a scene is done, sung all the way home. But they are cocky about it, cocky in the sense that the composer so well knows what he is doing that he can kid the very tune, the very sentiment, he is selling even as he is selling it. The mellowness is a real mellowness; and there’s scarcely a note that doesn’t slyly insult itself.

Walter Kerr (1972)
The First Night of HAPPY END

In 1928 two relative newcomers had created the smash hit of the Berlin theatre season. With their Threepenny Opera Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill not only conquered the German stage but created a musical that within a year received over forty productions in Europe alone, and that was to become one of the classics of the modern theatre. Brecht and Weill, who both had grown within the circles of the artistic avant garde, were stunned by this sudden commercial success. In disbelief, yet with pride they watched the unexpected box-office draw of the Threepenny Opera.

It is not surprising that producers now wanted to follow up and profit from this unprecedented triumph. Both author and composer were approached by at least a dozen agents and producers, who all tried to explore and exploit the newly found goldmine.

Both, but particularly Brecht with his growing Marxist convictions, was in a true dilemma. Should he give in to the temptation of the box-office? Wouldn't he, by economic definition, become a prostitute? And the crucial question: could he adhere to his convictions and be commercially successful at the same time? Being a born pragmatist, Brecht wanted to test this crucial question, and so after careful consultation with Weill he consented to another musical on the lines of the Threepenny Opera.

The producer E.J. Aufricht, who had already supervised the earlier work, insisted on as much duplication as possible: once again gangsters played a dominant role; once again a series of snappy songs entertained the audience; and once again the parts were taken by the cream of the acting/singing profession. All the ingredients were there; success seemed secure.

Happy End, as the new venture was to be called, opened on September 2, 1929 in Berlin. The house had been packed hours before with the curious, the trendy, and critics from all the leading German papers. It was an event to equal, or hopefully outrival, the team’s former hit. But what had been so carefully planned as a firework ended in a near-riot. The production was repeatedly interrupted by waves of booing. To observers it seemed clear that these interruptions had been meticulously orchestrated. Brecht the Communist and Weill the Jew had become the chosen target of fascist activists. These Nazi troopers were determined to prevent another smash hit along the lines of the Threepenny Opera, and they succeeded. Fearful of riots that could have easily turned violent, the ticket-buying public stayed away, and after two further performances the show was pulled.

This early failure of Happy End has unfortunately always made it one of the neglected pieces by the Brecht/Weill team. Unfortunately, because it shows Brecht the lyricist and Weill the composer at their very best. The ideological base of the piece might be muddled; the plot construction might be negligent; but the songs are so potent that they make us forget any dramatic deficiency the play might have. Here, in the songs of Happy End, the dramatic skill and musical genius of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill come to full blossom. Indeed, one could argue, their collaboration has never been better.
The Action takes place in the late 1920's.
There will be two 10 minute intermissions.
Music by Kurt Weill

Original libretto attributed to “Dorothy Lane”
Book and lyrics adapted by Michael Feingold

PRODUCTION

Technical Director .......................................................... IAN PRATT
Properties Mistress ....................................................... SHERRY DARCUS
Lighting Execution ......................................................... ROBERT EBERLE
Set Construction .......................................................... JOHN HENRICKSON, DON GRIFFITHS
Costume Supervisor ....................................................... ROSEMARIE HESELTON
Show Drop Executed by ................................................ DON S. DAVIS
Cutter ............................................................................ CHRISTINA McQUARRIE
Asst. Scenic Artist .......................................................... BARRY KOOTCHIN
Properties Assistant ....................................................... MELODY ANDERSON
Wigs ............................................................................... TERRY KUZYK
Scenic Artist ..................................................................... DAVID ROBERTS

Stage Managers ............................................................... KATHLEEN MEASURES, CHRISTINE PLUNKETT,
LAURA JANESHEWSKI
Asst. to the Set Designer .................................................. NANCY FORD
Asst. to the Costume Designer ......................................... ALLISON DAWSON
Asst. to the Lighting Designer .......................................... ROBERT HAMILTON
Hats Executed by ............................................................ SHEILA WHITE
Wardrobe ........................................................................ OWEN LOCK
Crew ............................................................................. CYNTHIA BURTINSHAW, JACQUELINE KING,
SIOBHAN RYAN, DEBBIE STARR

Business Manager ........................................................... MARJORIE FORDHAM
Box Office ......................................................................... CAROL FISHER, MARK HOPKINS,
LINDA HUMPHRIES
Program Co-ordinator .................................................... JOYCE TINNION
House Manager ............................................................... DEBRA BARRS
Production ........................................................................ NORMAN YOUNG

Vocal Coach ....................................................................... STEVEN THORNE

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Editor/Continuity ............................................................ VANESSA BARKER
Gaffer/Continuity ............................................................ GEOFF RODGERS
Grip .............................................................................. PETER FUERSENGER
Make-up ........................................................................... LAVONNE GIRARD

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Having considered the problem of my neighbor Mr. K. who played music as a form of exercise in order to be strong enough to beat his enemies downtown so as to be able to eat, I ask the following question: Why does he eat?

One day Mr. K. met a man he hadn't seen in many years. "You haven't changed one bit", said the man. "Oh", said Mr. K. and turned pale.

Mr. K. preferred City B to City A. "Why?", asked a neighbor. Mr. K. answered: "In City A they loved me; but in City B they were my friends. In City A they gave service; but in City B they needed me. In City A they invited me for dinner; but in City B they asked me into the kitchen."

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Three Stories on Mr. K.

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