

# 1 Lehrstück, Opera, and the New Audience Contract of the Epic Theater

Lehrstücke (learning plays) and opera occupy opposite ends of the continuum for audience experience in musical theater.<sup>1</sup> Brecht observed that the social contract in effect for opera audiences stipulated not only that participants empathize with characters, suspend disbelief, and submit to emotional manipulation, but that they do so under the influence of the powerful narcotic of continuous music. Similar conditions were imposed in nonoperatic theater, but opera was the most extreme example because of its perpetual, manipulative musical presence. Brecht countered this in two ways: from within the system, in his two operas (*Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*), and from outside the system, in his four Lehrstücke (*Lindbergh Flight*, *Lehrstück*, *He Who Said Yes*, and *The Decision*), which did not require an audience at all. Lehrstücke could effectively render attendees a nonaudience by transforming them into participants or, at the very least, prospective participants. Brecht's simultaneous work in both genres in the late 1920s generated the theory of epic theater and determined its primary goal: renegotiation of the audience's pact with the theater and, by extension, the citizen's contract with society.<sup>2</sup> The fact that epic theater's provenance is also musical, as it emerged from his simultaneous engagement with two diametrically opposed musical theater genres, Lehrstück and opera,<sup>3</sup> warrants further inquiry.

## DEFINING THE LEHRSTÜCK (1928–1930)

Brecht ran the Lehrstück experiment concurrently with the opera experiment, thereby attacking the problem of the audience contract from both sides at once.<sup>4</sup> In this period he wrote the interactive radio play *Lindbergh Flight* (*The Flight over the Ocean*), usually identified as a Lehrstück; *Lehr-*

stück (*The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*); *He Who Said Yes/He Who Said No*; *The Decision*; and *The Exception and the Rule*.<sup>5</sup> These texts are interleaved chronologically with work on *Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, and their simultaneous gestations provided ample opportunity for cross-pollination and confluence. Lehrstücke were written for a specific time and place, namely, that of the late Weimar Republic and a society thought to be in transition to socialism; when conditions were no longer hospitable, Brecht stopped writing them. Only *The Horatians and the Curiatians* (1934) and the fragment *Demise of the Egotist Johann Fatzer* (1927) fall outside the chronological frame.

My purpose in this analysis is to reclaim the Lehrstück as a musical genre and establish its status as the anti-opera musical theater tributary to the new audience contract; therefore a brief overview of the Lehrstück is in order.<sup>6</sup> The following features are generally agreed upon as definitive of the genre: the Lehrstücke are intended more for the performers than for an audience; the roles are to be rotated among amateur performers; and they serve a didactic purpose. (Note the conspicuous absence of an essential musical component; I will return to this in a moment.) The Lehrstücke unify the production and consumption of art in a single reciprocal process that challenged the concept of audiences as mere consumers of cultural products.<sup>7</sup> Of course, as Roswitha Mueller observes, "Audience reception, the insistence that the audience develop an altogether different attitude, is at the core of Brechtian theory,"<sup>8</sup> but it has a particular manifestation in the Lehrstücke that undermined the implicit passivity of the word "reception." The principle that theater *required* performers and an audience, and that those participants had to be discrete entities, had been the premise of all previous audience contracts in the theater. The Lehrstücke represented a radical affront to that basic tenet.

Over time, however, the perception of the role of the audience has become distorted. Brecht had written, "[The Lehrstücke] do not *need* an audience" (emphasis added),<sup>9</sup> but Jameson writes of the necessary "*exclusion* of the public" (emphasis added),<sup>10</sup> demonstrating the ease with which the absence of necessity becomes the necessity of absence. The slippage in this conventional wisdom is to blame for much confusion about the genre, for even under Brecht's supervision the Lehrstücke were staged for nonperforming audiences more often than performing ones. *Lindbergh Flight*, *Lehrstück*, and *The Decision* all debuted before spectating audiences. Eisler described the premiere of *The Decision* as an event, and it is the text most often cited as paradigmatic of the Lehrstück. But the advertising campaign, the prominent venue selected for the premiere (the Berlin Philharmonic,

albeit at 11:30 P.M.), and the post-performance questionnaire distributed to audience members all call into question the exclusion of a spectating audience as an essential feature of the genre.<sup>11</sup> Apparently these plays could be useful for nonperforming audiences even at the time of their premieres. It is more accurate to say that a *Lehrstück* *may* have a spectating audience but that its primary function is not to play to those members.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE LEHRSTÜCK AS A MUSICAL GENRE

Based on the genesis and content of *Lindbergh Flight*, *Lehrstück*, *He Who Said Yes*, and *The Decision*, I would add two defining features to the list of characteristics cited above, and both pertain to music: A composer was involved as bona fide collaborator from the piece's inception, and music is essential to its realization because it imposes order on an otherwise loosely structured genre and facilitates the collective experience of the participants. If these criteria are accepted as definitive of the genre, then they also problematize the conventional wisdom outlined above, as we will see. In this context the music is not primarily intended to persuade or entertain an audience but rather to instruct its performers, so it is a fundamentally musical genre, anti-operatic in both conception and purpose. The music is traditionally underestimated in Brechtian literature, thanks in no small part to the playwright's own efforts to "demusicalize" the genre in later theoretical texts.<sup>13</sup> Krabiel's reassertion of the primacy of music in the *Lehrstück*, in which he posited that it is related "to the musical genre in origin, form, and purpose,"<sup>14</sup> was a landmark moment in its reception, and the historic Berliner Ensemble production of *The Decision* in 1997 prompted further reconsideration along musical lines.<sup>15</sup>

I would go beyond describing it as being *related* to a musical genre, however; the *Lehrstück* *is* a musical genre. *The Horatians and the Curiatians* (1934) and the *Fatzer* fragment (1927), both of which fall chronologically outside the main body of the repertoire, and *The Exception*,<sup>16</sup> originally planned as a *Schaustück* (traditional play with spectating audience), are the only Brechtian *Lehrstücke* not conceived with a musical collaborator from the start. Others were initially written for music festivals, namely the Baden-Baden Festival in 1929 (*Lindbergh Flight* and *Lehrstück*) and its successor, Neue Musik Berlin in 1930 (*He Who Said Yes* and *The Decision*). They were promoted by the musical press across the ideological spectrum, from *Zeitschrift für Musik* and *Melos* to the left-leaning *Musik und Gesellschaft*. By 1931 these journals could report a good-sized repertoire of *Lehrstücke* and related pieces, much of it written by people outside Brecht's immediate circle.<sup>17</sup>

The articles lumped together Lehrstücke, school operas, cantatas, and various plays, a gesture that can be interpreted in multiple ways: Musicians viewed the Lehrstück as a close relative of the school opera and therefore as some sort of operatic subset; the boundaries of a new generic category are inevitably fluid and permeable so that a text a playwright might call a Lehrstück could be designated as a school opera by a composer; all musical pieces intended for amateur performance were of a single genus. The collaborators themselves did not always agree on nomenclature, and sometimes they were inconsistent even unto themselves. Weill called *He Who Said Yes* a school opera, the designation which appears on the score published by Universal Edition, while Brecht usually referred to it as a Lehrstück, which is how it is identified in the nonmusical literature, although he too deemed it a school opera on occasion.<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of what they called the genre, Weill and Brecht had similar aims, and variants can be attributed in part to their differing perspectives as composer and playwright. The didactic function of the Lehrstücke is apparent in both text and music. Thematically, consent (*Einverständnis*) in the form of self-sacrifice for the greater good is prominent in three of the texts as a parable for teaching the method (*Lehrstück*, *He Who Said Yes*, and *The Decision*).<sup>19</sup> Weill emphasized the musical lessons to be learned from the school opera *He Who Said Yes* and balanced this with the importance of music as a tool for learning nonmusical lessons:

The music of a didactic opera must absolutely be calculated for careful, even lengthy study. For *the practical value of didactic opera consists precisely in the study*, and as far as the performers are concerned, the performance of such a work is far less important than the training that is linked to it. At first this training is purely musical, but it should be at least as much intellectual. . . . *It is absolutely worth every effort, therefore, to see that a didactic piece offers the students the opportunity of learning something in addition to the joy of making music.* (Emphasis in original)<sup>20</sup>

Musicologists treat this repertoire differently than scholars of literature, theater, and German, primarily because Brecht's penchant for revision frequently renders obsolete those texts for which music had been composed.<sup>21</sup> Three of the core Lehrstücke exist in multiple published versions. Their initial texts were conceived with a composer who wrote the music as Brecht wrote the text, but, with the notable exception of *The Decision*, the playwright revised the literary texts alone, and subsequent versions did not receive new musical settings.<sup>22</sup> *The Flight over the Ocean*, for example, was originally entitled *Lindbergh Flight* and remains known as such among

many musicians, despite the fact that Brecht revised and retitled it twice. The original performance at the Baden-Baden Festival in 1929 was billed as a radio play, included music by both Weill and Hindemith, and was a demonstration of the interactive potential of the radio medium.<sup>23</sup> Audiences gathered around radios in various rooms for the first hearing and then attended a “live” performance of *Lindbergh Flight* in which they were in the same space with the performers.<sup>24</sup> Shortly thereafter Weill recomposed Hindemith’s sections (the pieces that represented nature and the final chorus) and published the score as a cantata under the original title. In 1930 Brecht published an expanded text as *The Flight of Lindbergh*, “a radio Lehrstück for boys and girls”; in 1950 he added a prologue, suppressed the name of the pilot, and changed the title to *The Flight over the Ocean* to sever the connection with Lindbergh, whose Nazi sympathies had since been revealed. Yet Weill’s score, essential to any realization of the text, was never reworked to accommodate Brecht’s revised texts, and the original collaborative version between Weill and Hindemith had been withdrawn.

A similar fate befell another piece from the 1929 Baden-Baden Festival, *Lehrstück*, with music by Hindemith. The composer published the piano-vocal score with the original text in the same year. Brecht, who took issue with Hindemith’s preface to the score because it described the work’s sole purpose as “engaging all those present in the work’s execution,” published a revised and expanded text in 1930 as *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*.<sup>25</sup> Mueller may have taken her cue from the playwright when she referred to Hindemith’s score as “the piano excerpt for the *Lehrstück*,” a description that represents a gross trivialization of the composer’s contribution to a work that features nearly continuous music. She summarizes Hindemith’s preface as follows: “Since the purpose of the learning plays was simply to let everyone present participate and not primarily to create specific acts, the form of the piano music should be adjusted to whatever purpose was at hand.”<sup>26</sup> Surely it is not the musical form but the sequence of discrete movements to which Hindemith referred when he wrote, “The order given in the score is more a suggestion than a set of instructions. Cuts, additions, and re-orderings are possible.”<sup>27</sup> There is no “plot” contingent upon a particular sequence of events and therefore no reason to adhere strictly to the published sequence of movements. (With the pragmatism typical of *Gebrauchsmusik*, Hindemith also noted that the instrumentation was subject to change, depending on availability.)

In yet another communication breakdown between musicologists and scholars of other disciplines, Brecht’s revised text, known in German as

*Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis*, is typically translated into English as either *The Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence* or *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*, presumably to avoid confusion with the original *Lehrstück*. The *Cantata* title confuses the issue, however, because “cantata” is a musical genre, but this version of the text does not have a musical setting. Brecht’s latter version is most widely known among nonmusic scholars today while musicians continue to work with the text featured in Hindemith’s published *Lehrstück* score, and this perpetuates miscommunication. Mueller writes, “*The Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence* was an immediate critical success at the Baden-Baden Music Festival of 1929.”<sup>28</sup> Obviously this cannot be true; the revised text is not identical to the *Lehrstück* which was performed there, and it has no music, so it would have had no place at a music festival. This statement is typical of the way in which various text versions tend to get conflated, as if they were all identical to the final version, and without regard for the musical setting that was essential to the initial inception but subsequently shed.

This is problematic for Weill’s musical setting of *He Who Said Yes* as well, which treats the first version of Brecht’s play. Brecht was disturbed by its initial popular reception as a “model of religious traditionalism and suicidal self-sacrifice, a relic from feudal times.”<sup>29</sup> When the children who performed the work at a Berlin school suggested improvements, he revised the text and added a companion piece called *He Who Said No*, but Weill’s music for the revised version has never been published, and he did not compose music for the new text. Brecht left a note saying, “The two little plays should if possible never be performed separately,” yet how one should realize such a performance, if it is to include music, is unclear.<sup>30</sup> Musicians focus on the *Lehrstück* texts for which a musical setting exists, which in these cases are necessarily the earliest performed versions, while literature-oriented scholars are apt to take subsequent versions as definitive. The crucial role of the composer in the initial collaborations is most often lost in revision, however, and the absence of revised settings appropriate to revised texts renders later versions of little use in reconstructing the musicality of the genre.

The plurality of valid generic designations and versions of each piece that coexisted in 1931 has been effectively winnowed to a narrow, literocentric field that treats *Lehrstücke* almost exclusively as Brechtian plays, privileges his final versions of the texts, and takes little account of their musical origins. Jameson writes, “We have every interest in disentangling the evolution of the *Lehrstück* from the related yet independent destiny of

music in the Brechtian theatre."<sup>31</sup> Certainly it is legitimate to discuss Brecht's oeuvre without considering its music, but the literocentric argument is now the dominant discourse. It assumes that the *Lehrstück* text could and *did* evolve independently from its music and, by extension, the contribution of those collaborators. It omits the music, as if it had played no role in achieving the primary objectives of these pieces. Further, to declare that the genre's evolution needs to be "disentangled" from its essential musical identity, as if the music somehow encumbers it and obfuscates its meaning, bespeaks a fundamental misunderstanding of the genre. Jameson goes so far as to refer to the "integration" of music into *Lindbergh Flight*—scarcely an accurate assessment of the role of music in that text, presupposing as it does the primacy and autonomy of the literary text and its author. Nor does Heiner Müller acknowledge a significant role for music in his own *Lehrstück* project, which "presumes/criticizes Brecht's *Lehrstück* theory and praxis."<sup>32</sup>

To be sure, musicologists bear some of the blame for the predominantly amusical treatment of these texts. The *Lehrstücke* have not always been considered worthy of musical study, even though Weill himself identified *He Who Said Yes* as his most important composition to date in 1935.<sup>33</sup> Musicological legitimization of Weill in the wake of his commercial success in the United States focused on pieces considered traditionally substantial, such as large-scale operas and concert pieces. Furthermore, the entire category of *Gebrauchsmusik*, while historically significant, has no canonical repertoire because it lacks the institutional apparatus necessary to sustain such a tradition. When it is performed at all, *Gebrauchsmusik* tends to surface in theaters and university theater departments, institutions with largely nonmusical priorities and agendas.

The tendency to read the *Lehrstücke* as plays without music or as plays with optional music has obscured understanding of the genre's inception and performance and, it may be extrapolated, the significance of music for the epic theater. Andrzej Wirth notes, "The critical discourse in German studies has overlooked that the *Lehrstücke* are libretti and can be interpreted only in relation to the vocal, musical, and choreographic performance."<sup>34</sup> Wirth's choice of the word "libretti" connotes an essential rather than optional relationship with music. It stands to reason that any genre fundamentally predicated upon participation would require performance to be understood, and that that performance must include music. These are not plays to be read and studied like *Schaustücke*; they must be sung, played, danced, and staged.<sup>35</sup>

The genre's flexibility, while applicable to acting, reciting lines, and

blocking, is countered by the prevalence of music and its inherently structured nature, since it must take place in defined time and pitch. Writing from his experience as the director of many *Lehrstück* productions, Wirth observes, "The music locks out the freedom of improvisation and is not only a distancing but also a disciplining medium."<sup>36</sup> "Disciplining" can refer to a couple of aspects of music. First, the temporal specificity of music necessarily imposes a pace and a sequence on an event. Second, performing music as part of an ensemble requires a uniformity of execution that can only be acquired by learning one's part and rehearsing it with others, and that requires discipline. Amateur instrumentalists, for whom such plays were intended, could hardly be expected to sight-read their parts or follow a singer; nor could an amateur singer keep up with an instrumental arrangement that does not always feature her melody without rehearsal. Rehearsal provides the familiarity necessary for professionals to improvise, but amateurs do not possess the requisite skill and will perform the music as learned (barring memory slips). Even the skilled amateurs to whom Brecht had access in Weimar-era Berlin, such as the workers' choirs, rehearsed extensively, learning their parts by reading notation or by rote memorization.<sup>37</sup> The music thus performs two crucial functions in dialectic with the rest of the *Lehrstück* agenda: It imposes a degree of order on an otherwise flexible text, and it facilitates communal participation.

#### THE MUSICAL EVIDENCE IN FOUR LEHRSTÜCKE

To substantiate the claim that the *Lehrstück* is essentially a musical genre, and more specifically an anti-opera musical genre, two questions must be answered: How pervasive is music in these pieces, and how integral is its role to the realization of a *Lehrstück*? Simply put, the answer to each question is "very." The state of *Lehrstück* research is precisely the inverse to that of opera studies, which is to say that the primary body of scholarship devoted to the former concerns the genre as literature, theater, and theory, whereas the vast majority of work on opera treats the music. The relatively recent expansion of that scholarship to include focus on opera libretti, productions, and performance studies has been highly productive, and I submit that an expansion of *Lehrstück* research to include a focus on music could be similarly illuminating. Therefore my admittedly music-centered analysis is meant to challenge the conventional wisdom as outlined in the previous section by privileging an aspect of the genre that has been neglected, thereby reconfiguring the possibilities inherent in all aspects of the genre. For example, the wholesale rotation of roles among participants as a defining generic

feature of the *Lehrstück* is less convincing when one takes the music into account, since some roles require musical training and a particular vocal range. How would one ensure that all participants have the requisite skill and voice type to execute all solos? Likewise, the assignment of all roles to amateurs is not practical from a musical perspective, since many roles demand a degree of technical proficiency that cannot be reasonably assumed among amateurs. Finally, the notion that these didactic plays are meant to teach the participants rather than the audience, or that the participants and the audience are the same, is undermined by the fact that only one of these texts includes a part specifically written for the audience, yet all were premiered before spectating audiences.

Because the *Lehrstücke* are little known musically compared to their operatic counterparts, this analysis focuses on their scores to a degree not required in discussions of *Threepenny Opera* and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Four scores and their respective libretti are relevant: Hindemith and Weill's collaborative score for *Lindbergh Flight*, Hindemith's *Lehrstück*, Weill's setting of *He Who Said Yes*, and Eisler's music for *The Decision*.<sup>38</sup> The prevalence and prominence of music is determined most fundamentally by considering the quantity of musical numbers, the significance of purely instrumental pieces without text, and the amount of text set to music. How the music is deployed reveals its function in the realization of a work. To that end, the music in these four *Lehrstücke* is examined in three broad categories: instrumentation and discrete instrumental pieces in each piece; the distribution and type of sung pieces for solo, choir, and audience; and the use of melodrama (accompanied speech).

The sheer quantity of music in the original versions of these pieces is the greatest argument in favor of the genesis of the *Lehrstück* as a musical genre. The collaborative setting of *Lindbergh Flight* by Weill and Hindemith originally consisted of fifteen segments, and all but three were sung and set to music.<sup>39</sup> It is written for mixed, four-part choir and seven solo parts: Lindbergh (tenor); Sleep (alto); Fog, First Fisherman, and Reporter (baritones); Snowstorm and Second Fisherman (basses). *Lindbergh Flight* differs from the others in that only one participant is an amateur: The character of Lindbergh is sung by the listener at home, who follows a score as he listens to the other parts broadcast over the radio.<sup>40</sup> The text chronicles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic through newspaper reports and personification of the obstacles he encounters in the forms of fog, snow, fatigue, and fear of mechanical failure. *Lehrstück* is written for two male singers, speaker, chorus, dancer (originally filmed dance episode), three clowns, and orchestra. A

pilot is injured in a plane crash and appeals for help but is made to see that he does not deserve it; instead, he is told to reconcile himself to death and acknowledge his own insignificance. Scene 6, which features a spoken scene for the clowns in which they cut off the limbs of a giant one by one, generated a scandal at the Baden-Baden Festival. The piece has seven sections, and each is set almost entirely to music.<sup>41</sup>

*He Who Said Yes* is based upon the fifteenth-century Japanese Noh play *Taniko*, which Brecht knew through Elisabeth Hauptmann's German translation of the English adaptation by Arthur Waley. Brecht's libretto uses most of Hauptmann's text and incorporates the idea of active consent (*Einverständnis*), which is reiterated in the chorus at the beginning of each of the two acts.<sup>42</sup> A boy makes a school trip across the mountains to obtain medicine for his sick mother, but the route becomes too difficult for him and he is unable to continue. Tradition dictates that he must choose whether the rest of the group turns back on his account or throws him into the valley below so that the others may continue, but the choice is illusory. Custom requires that he agree to the self-sacrifice, which he does, after ensuring that his companions will acquire the medicine for his mother. The entire libretto is set to music; there is no unaccompanied dialogue.<sup>43</sup>

*The Decision* took shape almost simultaneously with *He Who Said Yes* and formed a counterplay or "un-identical twin" to it.<sup>44</sup> To the basic premise of the Noh play Eisler added a new mission and location inspired by his brother Gerhart Eisler's Comintern work in China. Three comrades report that they had to execute a fourth because he repeatedly compromised their communist mission, and they ask the party in the form of the Control Chorus to pass judgment on their decision. The fourth comrade's sympathy for individual suffering led him to disobey orders and jeopardize the organization of the workers' movement, and he tells his comrades that they must kill him to preserve the integrity of the mission. They do so, and the Control Chorus affirms their decision because he was a threat to the well-being of the collective. Sublimation of the individual to the group and the cause struck many as unnecessarily harsh, and protests arose from both the Right and the Left.<sup>45</sup> *The Decision* contains a prologue and eight scenes.<sup>46</sup> It is longer than previous Lehrstücke and features a greater variety of musical forms and textures. It includes frequent passages of unaccompanied spoken dialogue, typically at the beginnings and ends of scenes, but also interspersed within and between musical numbers. Although the percentage of text set to music in this piece is smaller than that of the others, it is nevertheless an overwhelmingly musical experience because it

takes longer to deliver text via song than speech and the audience hears music for a much larger percentage of the performance than it hears unaccompanied dialogue.

### *Instrumentation and Instrumental Passages*

Weill and Hindemith's *Lindbergh Flight* was composed for a larger ensemble than subsequent *Lehrstücke* because it was intended for radio broadcast, and the orchestra would have been a professional group performing live in a studio. At the Baden-Baden premiere, the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra played for *Lindbergh Flight*. On the other hand, Hindemith composed the *Lehrstück* orchestra parts for low-, medium-, and high-range instruments to facilitate doubling and substitution, and amateurs performed these parts on string instruments at the premiere. The offstage brass ensemble could also be augmented or substituted and was originally composed of members from the Lichtental Music Society. *He Who Said Yes* specified a complement of woodwind, keyboard, percussion, and plucked instruments, while *The Decision* was composed for brass, piano, and percussion. The preponderance of brass may be attributed to the prevalence of community bands in Germany during the Weimar Republic era.

These pieces are only nominally staged, so there is little need for instrumental music to accompany action without text. *Lindbergh Flight* has two segments with sizeable introductions, one with a substantial postlude, one with a lengthy saxophone solo, and another with two eight-measure interludes. Hindemith's *Lehrstück* contains only a few segments of instrumental music to accompany action, most extensively in the clown dismemberment scene. The first and last pieces in Weill's score for *He Who Said Yes* are identical; each chorus is framed with a substantive instrumental introduction and postlude. In the interim there are scarcely four consecutive measures of music without singing and no discrete instrumental pieces. Eisler's score for *The Decision* is also framed by a chorus with a lengthy prelude, and most other instances of purely instrumental music are similarly situated. The distribution and donning of masks in number 3a features an instrumental accompaniment, and number 8b, "Supply and Demand," has a memorable fourteen-measure interlude after verses one and two.

### *Choir, Solo, and Audience Singing*

Music is well-nigh omnipresent, then, and vocal music outweighs any strictly instrumental component. These two features align the *Lehrstück* more closely with opera than with any other theatrical genre, so the deployment of these musical components must undermine that association if the *Lehrstück*

is to succeed as anti-opera. This subversion is accomplished primarily with the chorus, which, according to Brecht's music-drama orientation, played a minimal role in opera and undermines the diva-driven emphasis on the individual singer. The Lehrstück always includes a chorus and is generally thought to privilege the choir over the soloists, as befits a text for amateur performance with a didactic focus on groups or causes larger than the individual. There is great variety in these four pieces, however, with regard to the distribution of weight between soloists and chorus in the number of pieces, the length of those pieces, the type of vocal writing, and the level of virtuosity required. The difficulty of some of the music and the use of some professional and semiprofessional performers at the premieres undermine the notion that such texts are meant only for amateurs. Certainly the genre was calculated to capitalize upon the burgeoning workers' choir movement in the Weimar Republic, but only *The Decision* is truly chorus dominated. In fact, several reports of performances of *The Decision* in 1930 and 1931 describe it as a choral work of one variety or another,<sup>47</sup> and Reinhard Krüger interprets its "scenic choral work as the new form of the Lehrstück."<sup>48</sup> It is one of the many curiosities of the genre's history that the least-performed text, and the one whose prominent use of the chorus actually distinguishes it from the other three, came to be representative of the entire repertoire.

The Hugo Holles Madrigal Society, apparently a semiprofessional choir, was the chorus for the premiere of Weill and Hindemith's *Lindbergh Flight*. The prevalence of the chorus in *Lindbergh Flight* may give the appearance of community—the chorus sings in half of the twelve musical sections—but it does not function in the same way in which the live, participatory choruses of the other Lehrstücke do because it is mediated by the radio, as is every element of this piece except the part of Lindbergh. Some of the soloists were established, operatically trained singers, such as the Hungarian bass Oskar Kálmán, who had created the title role in Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* in 1918 and here sang Snow; and Josef Witt, a tenor with a notable career at the Vienna Staatsoper, who premiered the role of Lindbergh as a demonstration.<sup>49</sup> The Hugo Holles Madrigal Society also sang the premiere of Hindemith's *Lehrstück*, and this choral writing is considerably more difficult than that of *Lindbergh Flight*. It ranges from imitative polyphony to homophonic chorale style to parallel octaves and unison. The chorus figures prominently in five of its seven sections, but despite this substantial choral presence, the solos in *Lehrstück* are conspicuous because they are even more virtuosic, particularly those for the tenor who plays the downed pilot. This role was also premiered by Witt, and the second soloist was Kálmán.<sup>50</sup> The vocal writing is less deliberately diatonic and melodic throughout, and the

orchestral parts do not always double the vocal lines. The text that bears as its title the name of the genre is perhaps the least appropriate for amateur performance where the singers are concerned.

*He Who Said Yes* strikes a balance between soloists and chorus. Four of the six numbers in the first act are for soloists only, and one of them features a trio for the soloists, a rare ensemble piece in the *Lehrstück* repertoire for individuals whose parts are delineated as such rather than as a collective singing homophonically. By contrast, the second act has six numbers, only one of which omits the chorus. It may impress as being even more pervasively choral because the three students who want to hurl the boy into the valley tend to sing as a single unit. In the choral frame that begins each act and provides the finale, the choir explains the moral of the story; elsewhere it narrates, describing events but not participating in them. Weill's choral writing tends to be homophonic, with instances of paired imitation between upper and lower voices. For both soloists and chorus, the vocal lines are either doubled in the instruments or clearly supported harmonically through chord progressions. Unlike Hindemith's solo parts in *Lehrstück*, Weill's solos in *He Who Said Yes* are not particularly virtuosic and could be performed by amateurs with adequate rehearsal.

The identity of the choir in *The Decision* changes depending on the situation.<sup>51</sup> The choir interacts with the comrades as a collective character (the committee), and as that committee, it provides the *raison d'être* for the entire play, because it requires the comrades to reenact the events that led them to kill their colleague. (At the premiere the choir was an overwhelming physical presence as well, as it included hundreds of singers from three workers' choirs.)<sup>52</sup> The choir sings in almost every number: It assumes the roles of others involved in various scenarios, and, most famously, it declaims party doctrine in Eisler's inimitable *Kampflieder* style. Eisler was widely recognized as the leading art-music composer committed to the workers' chorus movement, and the militant choral presence associated with *The Decision* reflects this orientation.<sup>53</sup> The revolutionary songs he was composing for the movement in general and for the agitprop troupe *Das rote Sprachrohr* (The Red Megaphone) had the greatest influence on his choral writing for the *Lehrstück*.<sup>54</sup> He had also experimented with choral writing in a larger nondramatic genre in the cantata *Tempo der Zeit*, a piece for amateurs on a text by David Weber about the double-edged sword of "progress" that had also been performed at the Baden-Baden Festival in 1929.<sup>55</sup> H. H. Stuckenschmidt noted the significance of Eisler's involvement with the workers' choruses:

Eisler . . . plays a unique role in musical life today. Without figuring prominently on the programs of bourgeois concerts, he is one of the most performed composers and moreover a thoroughly popular man among the working class. He came out of Schoenberg's school and is able to turn his hand to strong composition, and he has a simplicity of melody and harmony that has secured him the broadest publicity among the workers. . . . Only those who ignore the difficulty of writing a deliberately comprehensible choral setting for workers can reproach him for monotony.<sup>56</sup>

Hindemith and Weill had already established themselves as opera composers, but Eisler had not completed an opera (nor would he, despite many attempts) and was not operating from that reputation or orientation.

Paradoxically, and in stark contrast to the choral presence, *The Decision* also features what may be the most operatic material in all the *Lehrstücke* in scene 5 ("What Is a Man, Anyway?").<sup>57</sup> The extensive recitative between the fourth comrade and the merchant (88 measures) is immediately followed by a long strophic solo for the merchant, replete with three verses and instrumental interludes (184 measures); this solo is one of the most popular and enduring of Eisler's songs. Together they constitute a set piece of some 272 measures of continuous music. Recitative is perhaps the quintessential operatic feature, as it facilitates continuous music where all other musical theater genres resort to spoken dialogue. It is traditionally speechlike in melody and rhythm, sparingly accompanied, and sung by one person at a time. It is bound by no musical form save that of the text, and it is subject to considerable manipulation of tempo and word stress by the performer.

The most anti-operatic moments are those in which the audience members become performers. This happens in only one case, when the audience is designated as The Crowd in *Lehrstück*. At the premiere the lyrics and notated music written explicitly for the spectating audience were projected onto a screen; participants were thereby activated and transformed into performing audience members. At several points the audience sings in unison in the form of a liturgical response, yet another allusion to the religious or catechistic roots of the genre. A few audience members (shills) sing accompanied only by sustained chords in the orchestra, and the entire audience responds verbatim. There are also sections in which a group of audience members repeatedly interjects a chantlike phrase as if it were an antiphon. The deliberate incorporation of the audience problematizes the generalization that spectating audiences were prohibited from attending *Lehrstücke*, and, at the same time, it challenges the other favorite notion that audience

Example 1. Hindemith, *Lehrstück* section 1: rehearsal I, audience response

This musical score is divided into four systems, each representing a different group of performers. The first system is labeled 'OR. INSTR.' and the second 'STR. INSTR.'. The third system is also labeled 'OR. INSTR.' and the fourth 'STR. INSTR.'. Each system contains two staves of music. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are several annotations in the score, including 'REHEARSAL I' and 'AUDIENCE RESPONSE' written in a stylized font. The score is presented in a high-contrast, black-and-white format.

Example 2. Hindemith, *Lehrstück* section 7: rehearsal B, a few members of the audience respond

This musical score is divided into two systems, each representing a different group of performers. The first system is labeled 'INSTANT' and the second 'REHEARSAL B'. Each system contains two staves of music. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are several annotations in the score, including 'REHEARSAL B' and 'AUDIENCE RESPONSE' written in a stylized font. The score is presented in a high-contrast, black-and-white format.

participation is an essential feature of the genre since it occurs only in one of these four pieces. See sung audiences responses in examples 1 and 2.

*Melodrama (Accompanied Speech)*

Melodrama, the musicological term for spoken text with musical accompaniment, is another distinctive feature of the Lehrstück that supports a claim to musical, anti-opera status. Accompanied speech had in fact been a popular feature of the Singspiel and of German Romantic opera, but it did not survive the nineteenth-century transition to music drama. Composers incorporated melodrama into some unstaged pieces at the turn of the century, such as Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*. The phenomenon of accompanied speech, and even rhythmic and pitched speech, was also familiar to audiences from the popular melodramas cultivated as middle-brow culture near the turn of the century.<sup>58</sup> After *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), melodrama was revived for the stage in modernist pieces such as Berg's *Wozzeck* (1923) and *Lulu* (begun in 1927) and Stravinsky's neoclassical *Histoire du soldat* (1918). Accompanied speech became part of the anti-opera stance because it so clearly undermined the melodic and singerly excess of opera.

Both *Lindbergh Flight* and *Lehrstück* contain brief instances of the simplest type of melodrama, in which occasional spoken lines are delivered over music. *He Who Says Yes* has no accompanied speech, and *The Decision* contains several prominent sections of melodrama that run the gamut of pre-*Pierrot* accompanied speech possibilities. These works include largely unaccompanied spoken dialogue punctuated by chords at the ends of lines or at specific points in the text. For example, Number 2a of *The Decision* is called "recitative," but in fact no singing occurs; instead, three comrades converse as a unit with the fourth, each line punctuated by a three-chord motive in the orchestra. Another type of melodrama is rhythmic speech, in which the rhythms are precisely indicated, the text is aligned as in sung music, but there is no assigned pitch. This is typically accompanied, and the speaker synchronizes her speech with the rhythms the orchestra plays.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of *The Decision* is its several pieces of rhythmic speech for the chorus. These range from the brief unaccompanied phrases that affirm the comrades' decision at the ends of scenarios, to the speech choruses accompanied by steady, eighth-note drumming, to rhythmic spoken interjections in otherwise sung choral movements. The effect of the chorus speaking together rhythmically as a collective, accompanied only by drums, is particularly powerful. The speaking choruses became strongly associated with the Lehrstücke and with agitprop performances, and would also become a topic of debate under the Third Reich, when they were incor-

Example 3. Eisler, *The Decision* Number 3b: mm. 1–10

*f* (sehr deutlich sprechen)

Wir für den Korn-mu-ni-zipal-kampf, der muß Kampf-frei-korn-tum und

nicht Kampf-frei die Wahr-heit sa-gen und die Wahr-heit nicht sa-gen

Dien-ste er-wei-sen und Dien-ste ver-wei-gern, Ver-spre-chen hal-ten und Ver-spre-chen nicht hal-ten

porated into the *Thingspiel* (“a form of mass outdoor performance, a historical story framed by a trial, planned in the early years of the Third Reich as the Nazis’ distinctive, monumental theater form”). National Socialist Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels recognized the choruses’ persuasive power and, “fearful that audiences would find the religious and socialist associations in the speaking choruses too appealing, ordered a nationwide ban on them.”<sup>59</sup> See the rhythmic speech chorus in example 3.

### *Allusions to Religious Genres and Rituals*

The uncanny resemblance the *Lehrstück* bears to the oratorio is another way in which the genre can be construed as anti-opera. The role of the chorus, reliance upon narrative, near-static staging, and tendency to promote ideology are all standard features of the oratorio. In fact, many early reviewers described *The Decision* as an oratorio long before Eisler revealed that he and Brecht had used Bach’s *St. John Passion* as a model,<sup>60</sup> and at least one critic anticipated the elevation of the party to atheistic religion when he wrote that communism was to Brecht as Catholicism had been to the Romantics.<sup>61</sup> The oratorio has historically been the sacred, unstaged counterpart to opera, and now the *Lehrstück* appropriated the oratorio’s most distinctive features (chorus, narrative text, and static staging) to mark it as the opera’s participatory, and therefore populist, activist alternative.

The oratorio genre raises the specter of religion and its significance for

Brecht. An avowed atheist who subjected religion to scathing critique in many instances, he nevertheless retained an intellectual curiosity about organized religions and a literary interest in the Bible.<sup>62</sup> His religious education had been extensive, and familiarity with the catechism manifested itself in the theater in references to the rituals of liturgy. The Lehrstück's roots in function and form are ritualistic, running to catechistic instruction and the Christian oratorio respectively in the blasphemous manner he had already established with his *Hauspostille*.<sup>63</sup> Hinton has noted that the generic designation "Lehrstück" carries deliberate and provocative religious connotations, acting as "a didactically motivated supplement to the *Hauptstücke* (main elements) of the Catechism."<sup>64</sup> He also finds that within the texts "the diction and the structure of *Lehrstück* are redolent of catechistic teachings, not just in the interrogative style but also in the inductive method of investigation. . . . Sacred means (underscored by Hindemith's sparse polyphonic choral style) serve highly profane ends."<sup>65</sup> Needless to say, the significance of music in those rituals would not have been lost on Brecht.

The primary functions of the music in the Lehrstück—to order its structure and facilitate communal participation—become apparent in the demands the music makes on the chorus. Not only is this true in the dramatic sense, meaning that the chorus articulates structure through narration and through its recurring presence as a frame to delineate acts and sections; it is also true in the symbolic sense. Choral music literally organizes a crowd into a collective, transforming a motley assortment of individuals singing different parts into either a sophisticated organism capable of performing as many as four polyphonic tasks simultaneously or a strong unison in which the individuals speak as one. The first is the symbolic musical manifestation of a complex machine with all parts working in harmony, and the second gives sonic form to ideological uniformity and agreement. Even when the chorus does not play a character per se, it represents the collective wisdom, the larger ideological force that counters and corrects the whims of individuals. The chorus provides structure for the individual singers just as musical form orders the genre as a whole. More so than in earlier Lehrstücke, the choir in *The Decision* is a descendant of the *turba* in Bach's Passions because its identity changes depending on the situation.<sup>66</sup>

Critics for whom the right to self-determinacy is sacrosanct recoil in horror at the choir's penchant for assimilation through annihilation of the individual, and it would be difficult to deny that that is a crucial aspect of all but *Lindbergh Flight*. It is a point effectively made by the choruses, and raised a problem that Brecht and Eisler recognized but were unable to solve:

These choruses not only facilitated mass participation but also tended to have a quasireligious effect that was highly emotional and difficult to manage, and this effect could easily lead to an unthinking mob mentality.<sup>67</sup> In short, choruses could generate both the desired result and its opposite. A chorus teaches dialectical thought because it enacts and facilitates the conflict between the short-sighted, emotional self-interest of the individual and the greater good of society (or the party), but in reality, there is no guarantee that the will of the mob necessarily reflects the greater good of society when it is singing. Regardless, the music imposes order on an otherwise loosely structured genre because it is the means whereby the collective takes the form of a chorus. This cannot be approximated or re-created simply through reading the plays or staging them any more than an opera is realized by reading the libretto or blocking the action. The *Lehrstück* requires the music, particularly the chorus, to concretize the lesson.

#### OPERA, THE ANTI-LEHRSTÜCK

Conditions in the volatile Weimar Republic were ripe for the innovative *Lehrstück* as an alternative to opera and its audience contract, but even so, Brecht continued trying to rehabilitate the corrupted opera genre from within. The two operas he wrote with Kurt Weill, *Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, are so much more familiar than their *Lehrstück* counterparts that brief synopses are sufficient for our purposes. Elisabeth Hauptmann translated John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in the winter of 1927–28, and Brecht pitched an adaptation of it to the impresario Ernst Josef Aufricht for production at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. Weill retained only one song from Johann Christoph Pepusch's original score (number 3) and composed entirely new music for the rest of the text. The libretto was also considerably different from Gay's and, as with the *Lehrstücke* libretti, continued to be revised long after the 1928 premiere. The revision Brecht published in his collected works in January 1932 was prepared without Weill and includes substantial changes.<sup>68</sup> His essay "Notes to the *Threepenny Opera*" was written at the same time and is therefore more accurately understood as a commentary on the most recent edition of the libretto and his emerging ideas about epic theater than as a commentary on the collaborative piece he had written with Weill three years earlier.

Despite its official subtitle as "a play with music," Brecht and Weill both described *Threepenny Opera* as the opera prototype.<sup>69</sup> It consists mostly of solo songs connected with spoken dialogue, and each act culminates in an

ensemble finale. The tone of "Notes" reflects a backlash against the tremendous popularity of Weill's *Threepenny* music and the precipitous decline in the collaborators' personal relationship. (The final straw would come during Berlin *Mahagonny* rehearsals in December 1931; their last piece, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, was completed long distance in 1933 and with minimal interaction.) In "Notes" Brecht downplayed the significance of the music, but their opera prototype nonetheless provided the pretext for a discussion of epic theater performance practice and the audience contract.

Brecht and Weill's second opera collaboration was *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), which grew out of their 1927 Songspiel *Mahagonny*. This piece is considerably less song-oriented than either *Threepenny* or its hybrid Songspiel progenitor, as it features continuous music and recitative, albeit in closed forms interrupted by placards and other production devices, but no speech. Thanks to the changing sociopolitical situation in Germany and increasing tensions between the playwright and the composer, the opera was problematic from the start. Despite having committed to premiere the work, Otto Klemperer of the Kroll Oper rejected it, citing the depravity of the libretto, and this became a recurring theme in the text's early reception. Virtually every production demanded cuts, beginning with the scandalous premiere in the Neues Theater in Leipzig, and a much-truncated version was finally staged in Berlin in 1931 at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm, once again under the auspices of Aufricht. The text Brecht published in *Versuch* in 1930 is not identical to the libretto for which Weill composed the score, and the accompanying "Notes," written with Peter Suhrkamp, are appended to this text rather than to the composed version.<sup>70</sup> Therefore I begin with "Notes on the Opera *Mahagonny*," as its publication preceded "Notes to the *Threepenny Opera*."

#### *Epic Theater in "Notes on the Opera 'Mahagonny'"*

Brecht's and Weill's views diverged on many aspects of this opera, and the composer had recently published several essays about *Mahagonny* to which Brecht now apparently felt compelled to respond.<sup>71</sup> "Notes on the Opera *Mahagonny*" began as a screed against the institution and art form of opera and became the blueprint for epic theater and its audience contract. The description of epic theater is couched in both operatic and anti-operatic terms, a reflection of Brecht's simultaneous immersion in both opera and Lehrstück. His wide-ranging critique of opera in this essay can be distilled to a renunciation of the way in which the opera treats its spectating audience, particularly where the music is concerned. The operatic apparatus, or culture industry, serves its own needs by reproducing the society that facil-

itates its survival and gains the complicity of that society by drugging its citizens.<sup>72</sup> That sedation comes courtesy of the music, which aids and abets the apparatus in insidious ways:

The opera *Mahagonny* pays conscious tribute to the senselessness of the operatic form. The irrationality of opera lies in the fact that rational elements are employed, solid reality is aimed at, but at the same time it is all washed out by the music. A dying man is real. If at the same time he sings we are translated to the sphere of the irrational. (If the audience sang at the sight of him the case would be different.) The more unreal and unclear the music can make the reality . . . the more pleasurable the whole process becomes: the pleasure grows in proportion to the degree of unreality.<sup>73</sup>

This paragraph warrants scrutiny because it makes several claims for music's culpability that subsequently determine its use in epic theater. First, music is the agent of irrationality in opera. Weill had written something similar in 1929: "In *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which we designated from the beginning as the prototype of opera, the music again assumes its irrational role: it interrupts the plot when the action has arrived at a situation that permits music and song to appear."<sup>74</sup> The implication is that the genre otherwise might be rational and realistic, but the power of music negates that simply by its presence. Brecht's concept of epic theater differs from Walter Benjamin's in significant ways, but this position is related to Benjamin's statement about the orchestra pit in his essay on epic theater: "What is at stake today in the theater can be articulated better in relation to the stage than to the drama. It is a matter of covering up the orchestra pit."<sup>75</sup> The pit is the physical space that separates the audience from the stage, demarcating the real space from the theatrical one. Covering the pit bridges the gap that is the hallmark of the theater tradition Brecht inherited and rejected, but Benjamin's remark also contains the seeds of distrust in music as well. The orchestra pit needs to be covered and muted as a means of defense, because the siren song of music originates therein. (For Wagner the orchestra was part of the apparatus that ruined the illusion and needed to be hidden beneath the stage.)

Second, Brecht reasons that music transforms reality into unreality, and the amount of pleasure experienced by an audience member is determined by the degree of unreality; the more music, the more irrational the situation becomes, and the more pleasurable. The word he uses for pleasure is *Genuß*, with its connotations of hedonism and excessive indulgence, rather than *Freude* or *Vergnügen*.<sup>76</sup> It is a particular *kind* of pleasure, then, one akin to

narcosis. If that argument is carried to its next logical step, Brecht is implying that the music is the source of this kind of pleasure. He invokes the quintessential operatic moment of a character dying onstage yet continuing to sing in full voice to the bitter end, and the accompanying parenthetical remark hints at the role he is theorizing for music in the epic theater. Because the audience does not, in fact, spontaneously burst into song at the sight of a dying man onstage, the fact that the dying man continues to sing *should* make that moment strange. In the opera it doesn't, presumably because the wash of continuous music, the excess of narcotic, has dulled the audience's senses. But in a music theater work in which the music is mostly limited to song-sized doses in the context of speech, music *could* have the effect of making strange. For the critical audience, music should become a marker of the unreal.

Third, Brecht argues elsewhere in the essay for the separation of the elements because the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner's total work of art, was also guilty of bewitching the audience,<sup>77</sup> and he assigns music a particular role in this process: "The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up."<sup>78</sup> If music is the irrational force that corrupts an otherwise realistic art form because it renders the whole genre unreal, it stands to reason that music is also the active ingredient in the alchemy that produces the (con)fusion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Separation is necessary to guard against music's tendency to dominate the rest of the text as well as the audience (this by intoxication or anesthetization), but Brecht does not take the draconian measure of banishing it from the epic theater. The act of quarantine acknowledges the danger, but controlled retention of the musical element admits its efficacy. As in *Threepenny Opera* (and with the exception only of the *Mahagonny* opera, which was an attempt to take "opera" as the subject of an opera and exploit its culinary nature), epic theater then confined music almost exclusively to the song: small doses, attached to Brecht's own lyrics, as opposed to the continuous, beguiling euphony of the music drama.

The concentration of music in individual songs may have appealed to Brecht as anti-operatic because he equated all opera with the continuous music of the music drama, but Weill welcomed the number format as a return to pre-Wagnerian opera. He recognized its advantages for a composer since it freed him from "the ungrateful duty of supplying the back-

ground for the incidents of the stage, of sustaining the plot."<sup>79</sup> Stephen Hinton, Kim Kowalke, Christoph Nieder, and Mário Vieira de Carvalho have each noted that many of Brecht's anti-music drama innovations bear a striking resemblance to pre-Wagnerian opera, particularly baroque opera seria (three-act structure, six principal characters, ensembles confined to act finales).<sup>80</sup> The most significant similarity is the central role assigned to the song, which is equivalent in prominence to that of the aria in opera seria. The song format, independent of the connective tissue of recitative, allowed the order of musical numbers to be changed, and their narrative character permitted substitutions and reassignment of numbers to different characters.

The song has a formal function in the epic work that is similar to that of the aria in opera seria, but it is employed toward a different dramatic end. Vieira de Carvalho describes the baroque opera seria aria as a highly stylized formula that exhibited detachment and self-control via the socially acceptable manner in which characters presented a single stereotyped emotion, or affect. This began to change during the Enlightenment, when opera was liberated from strict forms by flexible music that gave the impression of being natural and facilitated what was supposed to be a more spontaneous and genuine expression. However, the effort to render onstage the perfect illusion, artifice as nature, resulted in opera productions that were ever more complex, as seen in Wagner's operas. "Thus, what was at stake in the middle-class alternative was not taking off or discarding the mask, but rather making it cling more closely and imperceptibly to the face."<sup>81</sup> The exhibition of emotion in song was not Brecht's goal, but he did employ the number-opera form to call attention to the social masks to which people had grown so accustomed that they were no longer aware of their presence, either on themselves or on others. Song is a prime vehicle for estrangement because the music does double duty in this context: It renders that moment in the play strange, because it is irrational for a character who has otherwise been speaking to burst into song; and that moment in the play renders the music strange, because it reveals the ways in which the audience is constantly manipulated in a regular opera-going experience.

Given Brecht's distrust of music's maleficence, the new responsibilities with which it was now entrusted for epic theater ("the music communicates," "sets forth the text," "takes the text for granted," "takes up a position," "gives the attitude") were intended to limit its efficacy by forbidding its traditional work of intoxication, but Weill did not experience this as restrictive.<sup>82</sup> He understood this mode of composition to be the means by which music was reinstated as the primary element of the opera and to which the text was subservient.<sup>83</sup> The age-old duel between librettist and

composer ended in a draw: Each believed that epic theater ensured the primacy of his own medium.

*"Notes to 'Threepenny Opera'"*

Published a year later, *"Notes to Threepenny Opera"* focused on performance practice and audience attitude in the epic theater audience contract, some aspects of which are likewise indebted to pre-Wagnerian opera, particularly baroque opera seria. Aspects of Brecht's performance practice mark a return to that aesthetic of staging and acting, as Kowalke notes: "The singer was expected to bow to the spectators in the loges, smile at the orchestra and the other players, walk about the stage, complain to his friends that he was not in voice, and usually exit after the completion of the aria. The aria . . . was directed not to his colleagues on stage but to the audience."<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Brecht wrote that a performer getting ready to deliver a song is helped "if he is allowed to make visual preparation for it (by straightening a chair perhaps or making himself up, etc.)."<sup>85</sup> This should prevent undue emoting in song: "In no case therefore should singing take place where words are prevented by an excess of feeling."<sup>86</sup>

Likewise, the behavior of the opera seria audience can be seen as a forerunner of Brecht's epic theater audience. Members ate, drank, talked, and played cards throughout, turning their attention to the stage only when favorite singers delivered arias. Such detachment, if not outright disinterest, would render didactic messages moot, but it does suggest an audience in control of its faculties. Their behavior reminds one of Brecht's famous edict that a spectating audience member should adopt an attitude of "smoking-and-watching. Such an attitude on his part at once compels a better and clearer performance as it is hopeless to try to 'carry away' any man who is smoking and accordingly pretty well occupied with himself."<sup>87</sup> This is a far cry from the manipulated, anesthetized audience Brecht associated with opera and moves the audience closer to that which he imagined for the *Lehrstück*.

Brecht's performance practice theory for singing, however, could hardly be less indebted to opera. Whether intended to protect the spectating audience member from the seduction of the singing voice as a vehicle for music<sup>88</sup> or to minimize Weill's contribution to the wildly successful *Threepenny Opera*, these comments have resulted in the substantial demusicalization of Brecht's stage texts in performance.<sup>89</sup> He made two remarks in particular that have engendered a tradition whereby actor-singers feel obligated or liberated to completely disregard the musical setting in favor of speech or to recompose melodies as desired: "[The performer] must not follow [the

melody] blindly"; and "there is a kind of speaking-against-the-music which can have strong effects, the results of a stubborn, incorruptible sobriety which is independent of music and rhythm." These comments are often invoked to justify practices that disregard the fact that the actors who created these roles were also trained as singers. It could almost be balanced with Brecht's next line—"If he drops into the melody it must be an event; the actor can emphasize it by plainly showing the pleasure which the melody gives him"—if "if" were not such a strong qualifier.<sup>90</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

It has been argued that Brecht's simultaneous work on both *Lehrstücke* and opera generated the structure, performance practice, and audience experience of epic theater for the fundamental purpose of a new audience contract, and music was essential to that project. Reinstating the role of music in the inception of epic theater, arguably Brecht's most influential bequest, raises several questions. The purpose of the new audience contract was to break with the opera tradition Brecht had inherited, and yet these components remain tethered to both pre-Wagnerian opera and to music drama. Furthermore, Brecht assumed a one-to-one correlation between spoken theater and opera, as if the presence of music were the only difference between the two, but he failed to recognize that "non-Aristotelian dramaturgy, a sign of modernity in plays, appears in opera . . . as a piece of tradition."<sup>91</sup> In other words, Brecht's bold anti-Aristotelianism has limited power on the opera stage because that space was never Aristotelian in the first place. Historically, opera plots do not observe the unities of time, place, and action; they routinely feature illogical stories and nonlinear development, partly as a function of musical time. Singing takes longer than speech, even without excessive ornamentation and melismas, and additional instrumental music expands performance duration exponentially, so that time constraints prohibit the inclusion of all the requisite Aristotelian connections. It also means that audiences of operas that predate the music drama are accustomed to the lurches in dramatic tempo that are the inevitable by-product of alternating recitative and aria. Opera audiences are essentially inured to such formal devices from long overexposure and are well accustomed to compensating for missing dramatic links.

Given its long tradition of epic properties, then, opera was a logical place for Brecht to find effects for epic theater. According to Vera Stegmann, "The theory of epic theater inevitably becomes a theory of epic music theater," and Ernst Schumacher noted, "Epic theater in the Brechtian sense was only

conceivable as musical theater," but one can venture even further.<sup>92</sup> While Brecht advocated the "epic-ization" of opera by bringing that genre up to the level of theater, in many respects pre-Wagner opera was already at that level. Because music drama was a reaction against the then-prevailing style of opera, Brecht's response to music drama resulted in a return to its predecessor and even shared some elements with music drama indirectly. One might ultimately observe the opposite, which is to say that epic theater represents the "opera-ticization" of the theater.

Epic theater emerged from the negotiation between innovation (writing *Lehrstücke*, pieces that required no audience whatsoever) and renovation (rehabilitating the opera), during which two different roles for music emerged, both pertaining to the audience: structural and communal for the *Lehrstück* because it was participatory, and as means of *gestus* and estrangement in the epic opera for its spectating audience. The new contract meant that the apparatus—the impresario, the librettist, the composer, or the actor-singer—no longer dictated audience response because participants were emancipated to behave as self-actualizing entities. It permits and facilitates an independent, conscious, critical response from audiences unaccustomed to being in that position.

The contract is predicated upon several unspoken conditions, however, that, once examined, call the whole deal into question. Among them is the assumption that a critical attitude will necessarily yield the "appropriate reaction," that is, one that is consistent with Brecht's social and political message. The implication is that audiences will agree with the Brechtian perspective once they are sufficiently educated and skilled in the ways of critical detachment, but then they are in fact only "free" to the extent that they would have agreed with him anyway, had they known enough or otherwise been able to do so. Other preconditions suggest a certain naïveté about human nature, such as the assumption that critical detachment will result in reassessment and a change of attitude, when it may only reaffirm the benefits of the status quo. Finally, it assumes that people need to, want to, and *will* change, if given sufficient motive and opportunity.

Is the audience free to reject such epic machinations, just as the new contract freed them to resist operatic manipulation?<sup>93</sup> The contract gives spectating audience members permission to use their social X-ray vision, but does it permit them to train those sights on Brecht? Presumably the answer would be yes, that in fact it is even unnecessary because the plays are transparent, all the means of production are visible, and there is no hidden agenda. And yet there most certainly *is* an agenda, as Nicola Chiaromonte has noted: "Brecht's dice are loaded and are meant to be."<sup>94</sup> Do such texts in

fact open up possibilities for subjectivity, or do they coerce the audience with a roll of the loaded dialectical dice? If audiences *choose* to resist or to “mis-understand,” refuse to abide by the snake eyes they invariably roll, or decline to roll the dice at all, indulging instead in the hedonistic pleasure (*Genuß*) of music or humor, has the contract been fulfilled? What happens when the audience genuinely reclaims its right to self-determination in all situations, including the experience of epic theater? Perhaps such an event would signal the arrival of utopia and the irrelevance of Brecht’s theater project, but in the meantime, his plays can feel every bit as manipulative as the Wagnerian theatricality he rejected. The liberation of the audience to formulate a critical response suggests that the contract was actually intended for engagement with opera or other bourgeois theater rather than for performances of Brecht’s own epic pieces.<sup>95</sup>