

CU ★ PRESENTS

2020-21 Season
Digital program



Contents

Click on an item to navigate to its page.

An opera for our times ★

Performance program

CU Presents Digital

Your support matters

CU Presents personnel

CU ★ PRESENTS is the home of performing arts at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Great repertoire, lavish scenery, amazing voices and outstanding value—
these are the hallmarks of the **Eklund Opera Program**.



As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that the University of Colorado's four campuses are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pueblo and Shoshone Nations. Further, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribal nations historically tied to the lands that comprise what is now called Colorado.

Acknowledging that we live in the homelands of Indigenous peoples recognizes the original stewards of these lands and their legacies. With this land acknowledgment, we celebrate the many contributions of Native peoples to the fields of medicine, mathematics, government and military service, arts, literature, engineering and more. We also recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous peoples have developed in relationship to their lands.

We recognize and affirm the ties these nations have to their traditional homelands and the many Indigenous people who thrive in this place, alive and strong. We also acknowledge the painful history of ill treatment and forced removal that has had a profoundly negative impact on Native nations.

We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. We honor them and thank the Indigenous ancestors of this place. The University of Colorado pledges to provide educational opportunities for Native students, faculty and staff and advance our mission to understand the history and contemporary lives of Native peoples.



An opera for our times

The College of Music's musical theatre students dive headlong into the humor and despair of *The Threepenny Opera*.

By Olivia Lerwick

When looking for a musical to produce this semester, director Justin Johnson needed to find a work that would both suit his students and also be available for livestream. He soon found a friend in the Kurt Weill Foundation, which has managed Weill's works since 1962.

“I always direct works that I believe have a lot of heart,” Johnson says. “The foundation didn’t initially suggest *The Threepenny Opera*, but I asked because I wanted to direct a work by Brecht and because I believe the show has a lot to say about society today.”

Playwright Bertolt Brecht saw the devastation of Germany after World War I and believed it was only made worse by the corruption and materialism of the government. He wanted to write works that highlighted these issues without making them overly sentimental or too easy for audiences to write off.

“Brecht didn’t want his audience to be comfortable,” Johnson explains. “He asks that harsh lighting be used and that stage hands and backstage be made visible to the audience during the performance. He even asks for actors to break the fourth wall and break character.”

All of this is done to remind the audience that what they’re seeing is make believe. To jolt them out of their emotions and into their heads. To make them think.

But however dark the story may be, Weill's score brings a sense of lightness and even fun to the show. Though COVID-19 restrictions made it impossible to have live musicians, Jeremy Reger, music director for *Threepenny*, spent over 100 hours transcribing the music into software that will provide the orchestrations during the performance.

"The cabaret style of the music makes it possible for people to take in the more disturbing parts of the show without being overwhelmed," says Reger. "It also pushes the students to find vocal colors they may not have used before."

For students, *The Threepenny Opera* is a challenging show, not just musically but in its stylized acting as well.

"Because of his desire to distance the audience, Brecht wanted his actors to be more performative, even caricature-like in their acting style," Johnson explains. "This adds a layer of complexity to the acting because it's not miming nor is it realism, but a kind of believable exaggeration of real people and real feelings."

Johnson adds that working with the students on this show has been an exceptional experience, especially given the important intersecting contexts of Brecht's message.

"This show focuses mainly on the harmful effects of wealth inequality and corruption, but you can't deal with those things without dealing with things like race, class and gender. Working on a show like this has been a learning experience for all of us, and I'm really proud of everything the students have accomplished."

The Threepenny Opera is available to stream July 22-25. Tickets start at just \$10. **For more information or to purchase access, click here.**

The Threepenny Opera

A play with music by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht

July 22-25, 2021

Director, BM/MT Program

Stage Director

Choreographer

Music Director

Orchestrations/Arrangements

Production Manager

Scenic and Lighting Design

Stage Manager

Videographer

Sound Recording

Matthew Chellis

Justin Johnson

Tracy Doty

Keith Teepen

Jeremy Reger

Ron Mueller

Ron Mueller

Kelsea Sibold

David Starry

Kevin Harbison

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

By Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill

In collaboration with Elisabeth Hauptmann

Based on *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay

English translation by Simon Stephens

Presented under license from European American Music Corporation, on behalf of The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, Inc., and the Brecht Heirs

Please note: This production contains adult language and slurs, the use of drug paraphernalia, as well as depictions and graphic descriptions of abuse and sexual violence.

Cast

Macheath (Known as Mack the Knife)

Eli Harvey

Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum

Bennet Forsyth

Celia Peachum

Brooke Curry

Polly Peachum

Ellie Karp

Chief Inspector Brown

Michael Gaven

Lucy Brown

Caroline Dewell

Jenny

Annie Carpenter

Smith

Adam Johnson

Pastor Kimble

Maija Pieper

Filch

Layne Sellmer

A Balladeer

Melissa Burke-Manwaring

THE GANG

Matthias aka The Shadow

Kees Nachbahr

Robert aka The Iceman

Rylee Vogel

Jimmy “Retail”

Sam Meyer

Walter aka “The Scholar”

Mari Beazley

THE LADIES OF GRAPE LANE

Vixen

Kaitlin Miller

Betty

Lily Valdez

Ruby

Reilly O’Neill

THE ENSEMBLE

The War Veteran

Colin Ring

The Immigrant

Jordan Day Rhynard

The Teenage Runaway

Marisa Dinsmoor

The Un-housed Lunatic

Jenna Hines

The Drunk

Libby Shull

SPECIAL GUEST DANCERS IN *Pimp's Ballad*

Anisha Rae Cooper

Maddie Grove

Synopsis

The CU College of Music is honored to present this most recent translation of *The Threepenny Opera* produced in 2016 by the National Theatre in London. Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's original 1928 production, based on *The Beggar's Opera* by Elizabeth Hauptmann and John Gay, was a financial and critical success and is the work with which they are both most closely identified. Songs from *The Threepenny Opera* have been widely covered and become standards, most notably "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer" ("The Ballad of Mack the Knife") and "Seeräuberjenny" ("Pirate Jenny").

Set in Victorian London, the story follows the machinations of the morally ambiguous criminal Macheath ("Mackie" or "Mack the Knife") and his nemesis J.J. Peachum, the King of the Beggars. When Mack marries Peachum's daughter Polly, Peachum becomes incensed and endeavors to have Macheath hanged.

Brecht used theatrical innovations he called "epic theatre" to shake his audiences out of complacency and awaken them to social responsibility. Epic

theatre employs “alienating” devices, such as placards, asides to the audience, projected images, obvious scene changes and actors breaking character to frustrate the viewers’ expectations and ensure they are both feeling and thinking about what is happening on stage.

The Threepenny Opera was an early manifestation of this approach to theatre and revitalized social satire at the time, striking out at the hypocrisy of bourgeois society and morals. It is both humorous and moving—intended to entertain and at the same time provoke the audience into critically examining society and their own social preconceptions. The play is a sharp critique of capitalism’s potential to abuse people in the quest for profit and scrutinizes the dehumanizing impact of social, political and economic forces on the individual. In this production, we purposefully lean into the intersectionality of injustices involving race, class and gender, reflecting the current local, national and global conversations of our shared human experiences.

Stage director's note

By Justin Johnson

When students first found out we were doing *The Threepenny Opera*, there were several blank stares and remarks like “What is that?” or “It seems super weird.” When we began rehearsing and practicing the performative nature of Brechtian acting, comments changed to “This feels unnatural” or “I feel so awkward.” Finally, by the time we filmed, their reactions evolved into “Man, I didn’t think I was going to like this, but now it is my favorite show I’ve ever done!” I believe the shift resulted from recognizing they are making a difference through their art. They realized they could say something important about our world and maybe shift someone’s perspective.

The Threepenny Opera is as relevant today as ever because as a society we are more divided than ever. The wealth gap between the uber-rich and the extremely poor is widening every year. True gender equality is still a far-off dream. We can’t even agree that structural racism exists in the very fabric of our society. During the rehearsal process, the cast and I often discussed these modern injustices and how

their characters could best serve the message of the story.

What message? Well, the play is typically labeled as a “socialist critique of capitalism.” And while I’m not big on politics, I am passionate about humanity. And I’ve learned over my 51 years that there are choices in the way we structure society that would be more equitable, compassionate, and civilized, and would ultimately benefit everyone involved. Let’s add more diverse voices to our conversations. Let’s listen more often than we speak. Let’s challenge our preconceptions. Brecht said, “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.” Let’s shape something new. That’s what this generation of students hope to do.

Acknowledgements

CU College of Music

- John Davis, Dean
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- Leigh Holman
- The CU College of Music Advisory Board

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The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music

- Kim Kowalke, President and CEO of The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music

A note from Matthew Chellis, director of the BM/MT degree program

What a challenging year this has been for everyone. I want to acknowledge the many people involved in this production of *The Threepenny Opera* for their tireless work and love for this project. The BM/MT degree program has grown exponentially since the first season in 2019-20. I can not begin to express my gratitude and awe at the amazing work this entire production team has put into this presentation. The production team was able to produce this gritty and thought provoking production of *The Threepenny Opera* through the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am so proud of everyone involved—please enjoy the show!

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College of Music alumna Claire McCahan and instructor Jeremy Reger demonstrate proper COVID-19 protocols during rehearsals and coaching.

Today and every day, **your support matters.**

The Eklund Opera Program brings operas to life with incredible sets and costumes, while showcasing the College of Music's dedicated and skilled musicians. These productions provide opportunities for our students to study important literature and shine onstage in performance. Your gift helps empower the next generation of musicians and share the beauty of opera in our own community.

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OR



Die Fledermaus, 2016

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2020-21 Digital Programs

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