

The Three Penny Opera. Music by Kurt **Weill**, lyrics by Bertolt **Brecht**.

First performed in **Berlin** in 1928, two hundred years after John Gay's **Beggars' Opera**, London, 1728.

The longest running (6 years) off-Broadway musical when Marc **Blitzstein**'s revised it (text and lyrics only) in the 1950ies. First concert performance under Leonard Bernstein in 1952 at Brandeis University. Later at the Theater de Lys (now Lucille Lortel Theater) from 1955-61.

Berlin was the undisputed capital of the **Roaring Twenties**. Revisit **Cabaret** to get a faint and sanitized impression. Everthing flourished, the good and the bad, music and dance and art and architecture and cabaret and film and theater and poetry and satire and pacifism and street brawls and riots and inflation and unemployment. Vitality, hope, exuberance, decadence, misery and despair. The sound of a city. A glorious, screeching, deafening cacophonous din.

Then comes January 30, 1933, and Hitler is the new chancellor. A different kind of vitality takes over and an unprecedented period of barbarism begins.

BERLIN. "The sun shines, and Hitler is master of this city. The sun shines, and dozens of my friends are in prison, possibly dead. Thousands of people like Frl. Schroeder are acclimatizing themselves, like an animal which changes its coat for the winter. After all, whatever government is in power, they are doomed to live in this town."

These are among the final entries in Christopher Isherwood's **Berlin Diaries**, on which **Cabaret** is based. Hitler has legally assumed power and Isherwood, who "can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened," will leave the city he has come to love and return to England. The Nazi Movement that began a decade earlier in seedy Bavarian beer halls has now conquered its very antithesis, Prussia. It seems unstoppable.

We'll view excerpts from **Mack the Knife**, a film based on Blitzstein's version, with Raul Julia as Macheath, Richard Harris as Peachum, Rachel Robertson as his daughter Polly, and Julia Migenes as the star prostitute Jenny.

Like ancient Gaul, London is divided into three parts, the above-world and the under-world, with the latter coming in two rival parts, organized depravity headed by Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum and organized depravity headed by Macheath. Sex, greed, corruption, treachery, and more sex. Wouldn't you rather lead a virtuous life? asks Mr. Peachum. Why, of course, "but circumstance won't have it so." Mutual exploitation is the way of life, with victims and victimizers constantly exchanging roles. Witness the pent-up viciousness of the long suppressed. A lowly maid daydreams about getting even in Jenny's **Ballad of a Pirate's Woman** with power over life and death. Armageddon, followed by Judgment Day. The explosive rendition in the film by Julia Migenes rivals that of the legendary Lotte Lenya, Kurt Weill's wife.

Lotte Lenya is Jenny in a Columbia Masterworks recording, **Die Dreigroschenoper**, which she herself supervised. The first complete recording. Sung in German. Accomplished in four hectic days in January, 1958, in Berlin. Erich Schellow is Macheath.

The November 1998 issue of [Opera News](#) has an appreciative essay on Lotte Lenya, marking the 100th anniversary (10-18-1898, Vienna) of her birth. Mario R. Mercado: A Voice Apart.

On National Public Radio, ATC 10-22-00:

<http://www.npr.org/ramfiles/watc/20001022.watc.08.rmm>. The NPR 100: Mack the Knife (14.4 | 28.8)

-- A musical commentary by NPR's Murray Horwitz on the popular song from The Three Penny Opera, and a selection from NPR's 100 most important musical works of the 20th century.

We'll listen to the tape.