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What a Difficult Task it is for Music to Fulfil the Demands of an Epic
Theatre: a Discussion of the Role of Epic Music in Bertolt Brecht's Plays.

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Introduction

Music is an essential component of theatre.   Music was crucial for the early

Greek plays, to the height of Italian opera and up to our current theatre.   The writer and

director Bertolt Brecht recognized the impact music had in the theatre and incorporated

music into his extensive Epic Theatre theories.   At the same time though, I have

encountered discontinuity between Theatre and Music Studies, as the two rarely

overlap. Kurt Weill, one of Brecht's primary composers, saw a similar divide as

indicated in the following statement to his publishers before the opening night of *The*

Threepenny Opera (1928):

    Theatre people (as literature too) seem to be a bit frightened by the power of

music, and I fear that in the announcements and notices in the press the score will be

treated more as incidental music, although with its 20 numbers it goes far beyond the

scope of stage music. [1]

This not only supports my belief that music is often minimized in theatre productions,

but also supports the idea that music was essential to Brecht's theatre. Brecht's Epic

Theatre theories placed a significant weight on the role of music. This is mirrored in the

fact that all of his plays contained music with the exception of *Senora Carrar's Rifles*

(1937) and his revision of *Antigone* (1948). [2]   My key research question is to ascertain

the exact role that music plays within Brecht's Epic Theatre theories.   Secondly, I will

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[1] Kowalke, K. "Accounting for Success: Misunderstanding Die Dreigroschenoper" *Opera Quarterly,* 6:3
(1989) 30.
[2] Willett, J. *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches,* (London: Methuen, 1998) 167.

determine if Brecht's theories operate in the same format for all of my three case studies and lastly, I will conclude if Brecht's theories were static or if they developed over time. With this I hope to determine if Brecht's Epic Music is an achievable theatrical device. To do this, I will first define Epic Theatre and Epic Music. From this I will formulate a structure against which to place the plays *The Threepenny Opera, The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930) and *The Mother* (1932). I will then analyse my three case studies against this structure to determine how the music functions within each play. From this point I aim to determine the exact role that music plays within Brecht's theories in order to give proper weight and significance to an essential component of Epic Theatre and to determine if Epic Music is a viable theory.

As an aspiring poet and playwright, Brecht moved to Berlin late in 1924. He began by writing the majority of his theatre music himself. He started collaborating with the composer Kurt Weill after the opening of his play *A Man's a Man* (1926). The two men shared disgust for what they saw as the stupefying use of music in concert halls and opera. Weill was studying under the New Music follower Ferrucio Busoni and was a skilled New Music student. Together Brecht and Weill created their first collaboration *Little Mahagonny,* which played at the Baden-Baden festival of 1927, and from there went to scribe *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* as well as a handful of other plays. Their collaboration ended with the play *The Seven Deadly Sins* in 1933. During this time Brecht began working with the composer Hanns Eisler on a series of learning plays, the last of which was *The Mother.* Eisler was studying under the serial music composer Arnold Schoenberg and was an

active participant in the Communist Party. Brecht worked with Eisler up until 1938, after which time he had no regular composer, with the exception of Paul Dessau.

The Weimar Republic was brimming with struggles and tensions, especially in the arts. The theatre held strong to old traditions and battled against avant-garde practitioners such as Brecht wanting to introduce new techniques. Additionally the rise and popularity of the cinema proved a great threat to the survival of live theatre. The state of music was facing significant change as the rise of academic music such as New Music, atonality and serialism was progressively becoming less attainable for the average music consumer. The anti-traditional New Music movement began in the late nineteenth century and was headed by Schoenberg and his pupils, namely Alban Berg (Eisler's mentor) and Anton Webern and can be attributed to creating atonality and the twelve tone technique. [3] Atonality is the vanquishing of the tonal, in which key signatures are no longer required. Atonal music can sound harsh to the ear since typical chordal modulations are not employed. For example, take the song "Happy Birthday" starting on the note D (with F being sharp) you have the following very simple pattern:

D,E,D,G,F sharp

D,E,D,A,G

D,D,B,G,F sharp

C,B,G,A,G

As one can see, the song oscillates around the notes D,E and G with lines ending first with F sharp and then a G. The ear recognizes these patterns, which allows for certain

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[3] Füsl, K. "Music in Austria and Germany Today" *Twentieth Century Music*, ed Meyers, R. (London: John Calder, 1960) 126.

notes to sound "wrong" and certain notes to sound "right" according to our Western culture's way of listening to music. For example, it would not sound right for "Happy Birthday" to end on any note other than G since this is the pattern that the ear has already come accustomed to. Atonality, on the other hand challenges the idea of what the ear identifies as a pattern or harmony. The twelve tone model employs just what the name details, the use of all twelve tones (or notes within an octave) in a musical phrase. This disallows the repetition of a single note within the musical line and ultimately leaves little pattern for the ear to recognize immediately. Weill commonly employed atonal or dissonant chords or phrases in his songs which allowed for parts of the song to feel unfamiliar or harsh to the ear, and thus separated them from the rest of the melody.

While New Music was making an impact in academia, cabaret and jazz music was becoming popular and new technologies such as film, radio and sound recording greatly affected the music scene. Prior to this point the only exposure individuals had to music was through live entertainment. The ability to mass produce recordings and broadcast radio greatly affected the demand of live music. In addition to this, the politics of the Weimar Republic was facing its own set of struggles as there was a sharp divide between the right and left. Along with this sharp opposition of the right, the left found itself broken in two between the Social Democrats and the Communists. Walter Laqueur surmises that the cultural and artistic richness of the Weimar Republic was due to "an abundance of talent as well as sources of conflict, combined with the political freedom which made experimentation possible". [4] Therefore, it seems that the political and artistic struggles in the Republic were what served as a catalyst for much of the

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[4] Laqueur, W. *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933,* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974) 182.

innovative practices of the time. This was then furthered by casual censorship laws and

a number of highly gifted artists who sought change for the future of the arts. As the

Weimar Republic came to a close, the political energy was what eventually forced

Brecht to flee Germany after the Reichstag Fire in February of 1933. Most importantly,

this year saw the rise of Hitler to German Chancellor and he had an extremely negative

view of the theatre of the Weimar Republic. In February of 1933, the "Decree for the

Protection of the German People" was issued which allowed police unlimited control to

ban any literature they felt would endanger the people. [5] Following that in April of the

same year the "Law for the Restoration of the Career Civil Service" ordered the removal

of all Non-Aryan civil servants.   These laws and the general climate of Nazi Germany

was devastating for the avant-garde theatre, and it took many years for experimental

theatre to revive itself again.

Another significant influence on Brecht's work was Karl Marx and his ideals. It

is apparent that by 1927 Brecht had begun his quest for Communist knowledge when he

requested that Helene Weigel only supply him with Marxist literature. [6] Brecht was

preoccupied with the role and relationship of the individual in society. Leszek

Kolakowski highlights a common theme in Marxist literature when he discusses the idea

that humans are subjected to circumstance just as often as they create it for themselves. [7]

This concept is a repeated motif in Brecht's literature, as seen in *The Threepenny*

Opera's second act finale which states that the poor can only be moral once they are

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[5] Gadberry, G. *Theatre in the Third Reich, the Prewar Years: Essays on Theatre in Nazi Germany,*
(Westport:Greenwood Press, 1995) 7.
[6] Willett, J. *Brecht in Context,*196.
[7] Kolakowski, L. *Main Currents of Marxism: Its rise, growth and dissolution,* Vol. 1 The Founders, tran
Falla, P.S. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 158.

rich enough to be. This touches on the idea that the classes kept individuals in a cycle; where the poor would continually be poor and the rich always rich. Marx further explores the idea of social being and consciousness by stating that human beings are defined not by what they conceive but by what they produce. [8] According to this concept, one can only define oneself by the role one plays in society. Therefore consciousness is a social product because one is self-aware in respect to one's place in a society. Acknowledging Brecht's shift towards Marxism is essential for my studies as it is mirrored in his choice of composers. Brecht began working with the composer Kurt Weill who was progressive, but perhaps closer to a Social Democrat. After Brecht's shift towards Marxism he began working with the extreme leftist and Communist Hanns Eisler. Brecht's Marxist shift therefore, not only affected his theories but also his music.

In order to conduct my research it was necessary for me to choose a handful of case studies that would reflect all of the above influences as well as actively engage with Brecht's Epic Music theories. Therefore I have chosen the following plays to conduct my research; *The Threepenny Opera, The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* and *The Mother*. *The Threepenny Opera* seems the most viable candidate since music from this production has achieved the widest attention from both academics and theatre going audiences. Secondly, I have chosen *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* because of its structure as a full length opera and its roots in *Little Mahagonny,* one of Brecht's first major musical collaborations. Since both of these plays were written early in Brecht's career and both with the composer Kurt Weill, I

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[8] Kolakowski, L. *Main Currents of Marxism*, 56.

thought it essential to settle upon a third case study that was written in conjunction with Brecht's other significant composer, Hanns Eisler. I have selected *The Mother* because of its clear and concise musical structure and the fact that it is one of the later learning plays thus attaining significant clarity in contributing to the theory of Epic Music. It was also written and performed before Brecht's exile therefore providing itself as a desirable candidate when placed against the other two plays which were also written in Berlin. Due to the limitations in time of this study I will only focus on Brecht's earlier work instead of his later work. I believe this will give me easier access to the role that music initially played in Brecht's theatre and will help me discover if Brecht's theories were created through development or if they were static. The reason I have decided to exclude the composer Dessau from my studies is because he was never deemed a collaborator by Brecht and therefore I anticipate he did not actively contribute to the Epic Music theories.

Little academic research has been devoted to the relationship between Brecht, music and his Epic theories. I have been unable to find a comprehensive study on the exact function of Epic Music, at least nothing that has been translated into English. The most significant publication on Brecht and music is Joachin Lucchesi and Ronald K. Shull's *Musik bei Brecht* which details Brecht' s involvement with music, his writing on music, a listing of his compositions along with a discography, but this text has not yet been translated into English. [9] Several other noteworthy "German only"

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[9] Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988.

publications include Gottfried Wagner's *Brecht und Weill: Das musikalische Zeittheater* [10] and Albrecht Dümling's *Lasst euch nicht verführen: Brecht und die Musik*. [11]

Anglophone academics include Kim Kowalke who has devoted a large sum of writing on Brecht and music, but his writing is almost entirely devoted to the music of Kurt Weill.   Kowalke is President of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music and he provides articles and critiques for the society's newsletter.   Some of Kowalke's writings include "Brecht and Music: Theory and Practice" in *The Cambridge Companion* to Brecht, *A New Orpheus: Essays on Kurt Weill* in which he compiled essential essays on Kurt Weill in addition to the article "Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice". [12]   Another piece of literature devoted to Brecht and music is Michael Gilbert's *Bertolt Brecht's Striving for Reason even in Music: A Critical Assessment*. [13]   This assessment gives a detailed description of Brecht's interactions with music, but spends little time placing it within the Epic theories. Also many of its passages and quotations are in German, which proves difficult for the Anglophone reader. Joy Calico's *Brecht at the Opera* is an insightful edition as it details Brecht's relationship with opera and looks at theories on audience reception. [14]   Another significant publication is Kenneth Fowler's *Received Truths: Bertolt Brecht and the Problem of Gestus and Musical Meaning* which helps to unpick the meaning of *gestus* and how this relates to music and Epic Theatre. [15]   Laura

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[10] Munich: Kindler, 1977.
[11] Munich: Kindler, 1985.
[12] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; Cambridge Opera Journal 5:1, March 1993.
[13] Peter Lang, New York, 1988.
[14] California: University of California, 2008.
[15] AMS Press, New York, 1991.

Bradley's *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage* gives an abundance of information on the creation, production and reception of *The Mother* with mention of the function of music within this play. [16] John Willett is another academic who has contributed significantly to English writings on Brecht. John Willett supplies a brief but informative section titled "Brecht and the Musicians" in *Brecht in Context* [17] which looks at the role Brecht shared with his musical collaborators. John Willett's translation and compilation of Brecht's theoretical writings called *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* [18] has offered me the greatest clarity on Brecht's Epic theories. It details Brecht's writings about Epic Theatre from 1918 to 1956 and focuses on how the theories were developed. This book provides Brecht's various writings on the role of music in his Epic Theatre most notably with the articles "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" and "On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre". Although there is a large quantity of writing to gather my studies from, I have been unable to locate a singular study which devotes itself to discovering the role that music plays in Epic Theatre. Therefore with the following chapters I aim to uncover the objective of Epic Music in Brecht's theatre.

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[16] Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.
[17] London: Methuen Drama, 1998.
[18] New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

A Look at Epic Theatre

Brecht derived his Epic Theatre theories as a protest to Aristotle's theories on tragedy and Epic poetry in the work *Poetics*. With this chapter I will give a brief background on Aristotle's *Poetics* and will differentiate Brecht's views between Epic and Dramatic Theatre. Brecht and Aristotle had two differing definitions of Epic prose and tragedy. Brecht perceived his own theories as a combining of the two forms whereas Aristotle defined tragedy as:

> an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in
>
> embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts;
>
> in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear (what

we call)   the *catharsis* of such emotions. [19]

With this definition one can determine the beginnings of our current Dramatic theatre, which is played out by actors and makes use of a catharsis. Aristotle broke tragedy into six different elements, each relating to its own category and to the various modes of imitation used to create theatre. He contends that media is the first category which is derived of the elements of language and melody; manner is the second category comprised of spectacle; and, objects is the final category containing plot, character, and thought. Aristotle maintains that Epic prose must also follow these same rules but instead of being an imitation of action like tragedy, it should instead be narrated or captured in the written word. Therefore according to Aristotle's definition the only difference between Epic prose and tragedy is that Epic prose is written or spoken out and tragedy should be performed by various actors.

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[19] Aristotle. *Poetics*, trans & intro by Hutton, J. (New York: WW Norton and Company, Inc, 1982) 50-51.

In response to these concepts, Brecht formulated a type of theatre that he termed

Epic Theatre. Epic Theatre combined the live imitation of action with the idea of

narration. Brecht and Aristotle's theories differ in relation to the construction of plot.

Aristotle writes that the construction of the plot of Epic prose and tragedy should not

differ but both should be composed with a beginning, middle and end with a unified

action throughout. [20] Brecht, however, concluded that Epic Theatre should not have a

through line of plot but should be episodic. In substitution for the plot Brecht

maintained that the fable or story should be used. [21] Although Epic Theatre is episodic,

each scene must be linked to the next scene in order for the fable to be clearly told.

Therefore instead of focusing on the psychological journey of a character, the Epic

Theatre endeavored to fixate on the series of events in its story. Brecht reasoned that in

order to achieve the desired distancing effect from spectator to performer it was

essential that the actors not give into emotion, and from this Brecht developed the

Verfremdungseffekt. The *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect is the term used by

Brecht to describe the distance he created between the spectator and the performance.

This is especially important in Epic Theatre because it allowed the play to maintain a

narrated effect without giving into the emotional impact that, according to Brecht, was

essential to Dramatic Theatre.

The majority of text-based theatre during Brecht's time was rooted in these

Aristotelian concepts and thus Brecht was not only protesting against *Poetics* but also

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[20] Aristotle. *Poetics,* trans by Heath, M. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996) 38.
[21] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects,* (London: Methuen, 1977) 152.

against Dramatic Theatre. In addition to being heavily shaped by Aristotle, Dramatic

Theatre was influenced by the Naturalist movement. Naturalism developed in the late

nineteenth century. It focused on creating a realistic depiction of human life on the

stage. During this time acting styles centered on exploring emotion, the struggle of

human existence and the human psyche. The idea of catharsis was essential for

Dramatic Theatre. Catharsis is the moment directly after the climax of a play when both

the spectators and characters are purged of their hardships and emotions through a

resolved ending.   Brecht most clearly relates the difference between Epic and Dramatic

theatre in his essay "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction":

    The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me -
It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appal me,
Because they are inescapable – That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in
the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's

extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me,

because they are unnecessary – That's the great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when

they weep, I weep when they laugh. [22]

The primary goal of Dramatic Theatre is to create a plot that evokes an intense

emotional experience for the audience. Epic Theatre, on the other hand, calls for the

viewer to sit back and consider the situation. The main intention of Epic Theatre is that

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[22] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* ed Willett, J. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 71.

the audience leave with an unsettled feeling; unsettled because they have not experienced a catharsis. With this unsettled feeling Brecht hoped that his spectators would make associations to their everyday lives and ultimately fight for change in society.

Brecht first experimented with non-Dramatic performance techniques with his early work in the cabaret. An anecdote about Brecht's encounter with cabaret performer and comedian Karl Valentin during the rewriting and adapting of Marlow's *Edward II* is oft-cited because it claims to be one of Brecht's first epiphanies on his practices of Epic Theatre.   Brecht was attempting to stage the battle scene which takes up forty five minutes of the play and had come to an impasse as what to do with the soldiers. Brecht turned to Valentin and asked "Well what is it? What's the truth about these soldiers? What *about* them?", then Valentin said "They're pale, they're scared, that's what". [23] The actors then appeared in white face make-up thus turning the "They're pale" comment into literal meaning. This allowed the emotions of the characters to appear as literal representations, thus eliminating the actor's need to use emotion to portray this sentiment.   This alienation of emotion from actor was one of the grounding points for Brecht and his theories on Epic Theatre.

By Brecht's own admission, Erwin Piscator inspired or created many theories on Epic Theatre. Brecht joined Piscator's dramaturgical collective in 1927 and helped to adapt several plays in what Piscator had considered to be the "Epic Writing" style. For

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[23] Double, O. & Wilson, M. "Brecht and Cabaret" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht,* Second Edition eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 40.

example, Brecht borrowed the Epic techniques from Piscator's 1924 Berlin production of *Fahnen* which originated as a documentary style novel and was staged using methods such as narrative aids and projections. [24] Piscator's theatre was impregnated with politically charged Marxist ideals, documentary film footage, special technical effects, and targeted current affairs such as mass industrialism, capitalism and political extremes, all of which was dually reflected in Brecht's theories on Epic Theatre. [25] Brecht not only developed the basis for Epic Theatre from Piscator, but he was also influential in shaping Brecht's dramaturgical style. In an excerpt from *Das Politische Theatre* translated by Mary Luckhurst Piscator states:

> What I required from a dramaturg in the specific circumstances of our theatre was a genuinely creative collaboration with myself or the respective playwright. Our dramaturg had to be capable of reworking texts in the light of our political standpoint and to develop text and shape scenes with the closest possible adhesion to my directing concept. [26]

Brecht was renowned for this collaborative approach to theatre making and it is apparent that his time working in Piscator's dramaturgical collective prompted much of Brecht's theories and practice in the theatre. The main reason that Brecht was not faulted for taking ideas that did not originate with him is discussed by John Willett in *Brecht in Context* and is due to the fact that it was Brecht "who theorised about these things in print – Piscator scarcely did so – but it was Piscator who worked them out in

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[24] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht,* 109.

[25] Luckhurst, M. "Revolutionising Theatre: Brecht's Reinvention of the Dramaturg" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 195.

[26] Luckhurst, M. "Revolutionising Theatre: Brecht's Reinvention of the Dramaturg" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 195.

practice". [27] So although it was Piscator who did the majority of the research by practice, it was Brecht who put these theories into writing – along with his name as author – and thus Epic Theatre has been attributed to Brecht.

Epic Theatre Broken Down

The first detailed and definitive list of Brecht's Epic Theatre techniques was published in 1930 as notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. With these notes he included a compare and contrast list between Dramatic and Epic Theatre. Although this compare and contrast list offers a distinct opposition between Epic and Dramatic Theatre, Brecht also included a footnote that reads:

> This table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument. [28]

Therefore Brecht's Epic Theatre is not meant to be read as an exact opposite to Dramatic Theatre. With this chart Brecht aims to highlight the shifts in emphasis between the two theatrical styles. Although Brecht details various dissimilarities

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[27] Willett, J. *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches,* (London: Methuen, 1998) 101-118.
[28] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 37.

between Dramatic and Epic Theatre, I have confined my analysis to a few general concepts that are prominent in Brecht's writing.

Plot Vs Narrative

Brecht states in his article "Theatre for the Pleasure or Theatre for the Instruction" that Dramatic Theatre focuses on "the strong centralization of the story". [29] The Dramatic Theatre unfolds its story by means of characters interacting within the confines of the plot. The Epic Theatre, by contrast, uses a form of narration to tell its story. By narration I am referring to either the physical representation of a narrator on stage, or an aloof use of the characters as reporters on incidents throughout the piece. Just as the traditional Aristotelian Epic prose or poem involved a narrator reciting his tale, the Epic Theatre endeavoured to attain this same distance between character and actor. Instead of becoming the characters, the Epic Theatre's actors showed a representation of their characters, allowing comment and criticism like the traditional Epic narrators did with their heroes. The narrator would never become the characters in his story, but would recite the story as if he were an outsider. In Brecht's article "The Street Scene" he likens the format of Epic Theatre to that of a person on a corner telling a group of spectators about an accident he just witnessed. [30] Brecht emphasised that the narrator should not adopt characteristics or emotions of the victims in the accident. This will, therefore, allow the actors to keep a certain distance from their characters, and

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[29] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 70.
[30] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 121.

in turn allow the audience to observe the situation without an actor's emotion interfering. So, as the Dramatic Theatre relied on plot to advance its story, the Epic Theatre utilized narration in order to maintain a distance from the plot and the characters.

Brecht also discussed the idea that the stage itself would always play a role in any performance. The majority of Dramatic Theatre is written as if it were not taking place on a stage. Instead Epic Theatre insists that the audience be fully aware of their place within a theatre throughout the entire performance. Just a few examples of this can be seen with the use of a half curtain displaying parts behind the stage, placing the orchestra in full view to the audience or maintaining a healthy relationship with the audience by vanquishing the pretext of the fourth wall. The concept of narration over plot is essential to the Epic Theatre format. The primary reason for this is to maintain a distance from the developing storyline and by-products of emotions associated with it. By doing so, Brecht endeavoured to allow his audience an opportunity to utilize thought and reason within his theatre.

Experience Vs Picture of the World

Brecht's view of the theatrical purpose is that "Art follows reality". [31] While Dramatic Theatre encouraged the spectator to experience the emotional journey of the characters, Epic Theatre aimed to show a general picture of the world. Unlike

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[31] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 29.

Naturalism's objective, Brecht was very aware that it was impossible to show a truly naturalistic situation in the contrived world of the theatre. He therefore aimed to use current events and topics to raise awareness within his theatre. As Brecht asserted "It is a matter of indifference whether the theatre's main object is to provide knowledge of the world. The fact remains that the theatre has to represent the world and that its representations must not mislead". [32] Brecht insisted that Dramatic Theatre often used misleading and overwhelming emotions to hook its spectators into an experience. Instead of making the audience feel based on what a character was experiencing; Brecht argued that the spectator should develop his or her own rational thoughts based on the picture of the world that was presented before them. Brecht believed that "the puzzles of the world are not solved but shown" in his Epic Theatre. [33] Therefore, Epic Theatre gave the audience a chance to solve these puzzles themselves.

A large component of a successful Dramatic play is its ability to make the audience feel. It aims to give a realistic representation of humanity and their emotions. Epic Theatre, on the other hand, is a theatre of reason, but that does not make it devoid of feelings or emotion. As designer and author Mordecai Gorelik affirms:

> Epic theatre sees no reason why the spectator should be asked to check his intelligence along with his hat and coat when he enters the theatre…A healthy play should engage the mind as well as the emotions. Deep feeling combined with thoughtful is the ideal epic writing. [34]

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[32] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 279.
[33] Brooker, P. "Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 213.
[34] Gorelik, M. "An Epic Theatre Catechism" *Brecht Sourcebook,* eds Martin, C. & Bial, H. (London: Routledge, 2000) 32.

With this Gorelik suggests that Epic Theatre's primary goal is to activate the mind and prepare the spectator to make his or her own decisions based on what was situated in front of him or her. Brecht was not dismissing sensations or emotions, but felt they were an important aspect to the Epic play. With an absence of emotions, it would be quite easy for Epic Theatre to become cold and impersonal. But as Brecht further confirms, this was not his intention:

> (Epic Theatre) in no way renounces emotion. Least of all emotions like the love of justice, the urge to freedom or justified anger: so little does it renounce these emotions, that it does not rely on their being there, but tries to strengthen or to evoke them. The 'critical attitude' into which it is trying to put its public cannot be passionate enough. [35]

Brecht was not aiming to eradicate emotions in his theatre; he simply did not want them to be the primary product. He felt that Dramatic Theatre relied too heavily on inducing emotions from its spectators and left little room for thought or action. Therefore Brecht insisted that Dramatic Theatre negated the ability for the spectator to use reason by overwhelming the spectator with too many emotions. Dramatic Theatre relied on the emotional impact the play imparted on its viewers, whereas Epic Theatre would rather the audience face the play and, as Brecht is so famous for saying, put their feet up and smoke a cigar.

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[35] Esslin, M. *Brecht: A Choice of Evils: A Critical Study of the Man, his Work and his Opinions,* (London: Methuen, 1980) 130.

Brecht looked to the sciences to formulate theories based on facts instead of emotions; thus the human being became an object of inquiry for him. As Brecht writes:

Our own period, which is transforming nature in so many and different ways, takes pleasure in understanding things so that we can interfere. There is a great deal to man, we say; so a great deal can be made out of him. He does not have to stay   the way he is now, nor does he have to be seen only as he is now, but also as he might become. We must not start with him; we must start on him. [36]

In this statement Brecht is referring to his own period which he termed the scientific period. It is unclear as to whether he is referring to a scientific age in the sense of medicine, nature and industry, or to a scientific age regarding the science of the mind, but either way it coincides with his approach of looking at the human being. Science aims to look at the world in a purely objective fashion, with emphasis on the *how* and not so much the *why*. Dramatic and Epic Theatre have this same opposition. Dramatic Theatre rarely looks at the human being from the outside, but is concerned with what is taking place on an emotional level. Epic Theatre focuses directly on social conditions, and questions the thoughts and behaviours of the society.

With Dramatic Theatre every character has a main objective, which makes each character fixed in his or her development. Epic Theatre explores the process a character makes throughout the piece. Brecht commented on his Epic acting techniques when he wrote of Peter Lorre's acting in the production of *A Man's a Man*; "The fragmentary,

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[36] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 193.

episodic style of acting…was meant to show a man not as a consistent whole but as a contradictory, ever-changing character whose unity comes 'despite, or rather by means of, interruptions and jumps". [37] By using an episodic approach with a character Brecht felt this would give an expression of the character instead of a true representation. Esslin elucidates the concept of Dramatic characters being fixed when he writes that:

> The fact that the action was each time assumed to be happening anew before the eyes of the audience implied that the passions and attitudes of the characters were unchangeable expressions of a fixed "human nature;" the dynamic, tautly logical constructions of such plays indicated the relentless course of fate and made it appear unfathomable and incapable of being influenced by human initiative. [38]

In essence, the audience could not conceive of a Dramatic character as alterable because the fixed plot determined a character's action instead of his or her own free will. To prevent this Brecht developed the montage effect to create a seemingly fluid plot, thus allowing for his characters to be altered by circumstance instead of fixed to the plot. The montage effect was a major participant in the Epic Theatre format and is something I will discuss later in this chapter.

Additionally Brecht encouraged his actors to maintain a distance from their characters to contribute to the alienation effect. This is quite different from how the Dramatic Theatre engaged with its characters. The Dramatic Theatre asked the audience to accept the characters for what they were and what struggles they had to endure. One of the basic principles of the Naturalist style of acting is that the actor

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[37] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht,* 173.
[38] Esslin, M. *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, 117.

should never judge his or her character. The actor must play the character as if all of the character's actions were moral and correct, even if they were not. The Epic Theatre, however, creates an alienation effect which prevents the spectators from getting lost in the emotions of the characters, which allows them to sit back and place the situation in perspective. Alienation of the familiar makes the familiar odd, and therefore something to be looked at. If there is a sense that a character can and needs to be altered, this creates a sense of agitation - especially when there is no catharsis at the end. This agitation is what Brecht hoped would spur the spectator into making a change in his or her own society.

Growth Vs Montage

Brecht constructed his Epic Theatre plays as montages in order to maintain a distance between his audience and any potential emotional by-product of the plot. Therefore any spectator of Epic Theatre can, as Doblin writes, "take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life". [39] Since each scene is capable of supporting itself, an Epic play can resemble a montage of different scenes coming together to form a whole. Brecht says that "The story does not just correspond to an incident from men's life together as it might actually have taken place, but it's composed of episodes rearranged so as to allow the story-teller's ideas about men's life to find expression". [40] With a montage format, Epic Theatre is able to

[39] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 70.
[40] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 278.

combine several different aspects of the same situation, or even different situations entirely. One should, with any Epic piece, be able to separate the scenes and have each scene suffice on its own. If one were to take a single scene from a Dramatic text it would be out of context and lose some of its emotional impact. That is not to say that there is no growth in the plot of Epic Theatre, just that there is not a single line of plot to follow. Instead of linear growth, the montage format in Epic Theatre promoted a build from one scene to the next. Dramatic Theatre cannot be cut into pieces, but can only be played whole in order to achieve its maximum climactic potential.   Since Epic Theatre followed a montage format, it allowed the author to create a plot that did not have to follow the laws of time. Because of this, scenes based on temporal reality were unimportant. Dramatic Theatre is tied to time and therefore has a linear plot. One scene must happen before the other as it would fall on a timeline. If there is a shift back and forth between present, past, or future then the Dramatic Theatre must make this very clear in the plot, otherwise it could compromise the climax.

Brecht used theories from basic Darwinian principles in his Epic Theatre; that of evolution and evolutionary determinism. Darwin reasoned that through the survival of the fittest the strongest survivors would pass their genes on to the following generations, thus contributing to a slow evolution of a species. Evolutionary determinism refers to the concept of a species being determined to develop in a certain direction based on outside factors.   The best case study for evolutionary determinism (also known as directional selection) is that of the moths in England after the Industrial Revolution. The black and white moths would hide from their prey on the trees, and as the trees

grew darker with the pollution of industry there was an increase in frequency of the

black moths from one percent to ninety percent. [41] This same concept can be seen in

Dramatic Theatre where a character is shaped and defined by his or her surroundings,

and is predestined for a certain fate based on what life has given him or her. The

character will have one objective and carry on with that objective until the conclusion of

the play. Since Epic Theatre is not tied to a linear plot, this allows the character to be

irregular with his or her objective. Most commonly in Epic Theatre the character will

have many tiny objectives that make themselves apparent within each scene, but there is

no overlaying objective like there is with Dramatic Theatre. The Epic character is not

predestined by his or her circumstances but is altered by them.

The montage effect plays directly into another Epic Theatre device, that of the

alienation effect. One of Brecht's main devices for creating the alienation effect was by

removing the suspense from his theatre. He does this by telling the audience the plot

before the plot unfolds. For example, in his first theatrical work *Baal* (1918), the play

begins with a song titled "Baal's Hymn" which details the entirety of the plot. Since the

audience is aware of the demise of the character Baal before the action even starts, all

elements of suspense are removed. Therefore, instead of being preoccupied with the

ending of the play, the audience can focus on the path that the character takes in order to

reach his or her end. Dramatic Theatre is structured so that the entire plot leans towards

a climax. If parts of the plot are given away too soon this will weaken the climax and

make the catharsis less satisfactory. So where Dramatic Theatre directs its focus to the

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[41] Futuyman, D. *Evolutionary Biology,* (Sunderland, Massachusetts: Sinauer Associates, Inc 1986) 158.

finale of the play by keeping the plot full of suspense, Epic Theatre removes all elements of suspense so that the spectator can focus on the journey of the character and follow the course of the plot. Therefore the montage effect assists in interrupting a build of emotions throughout the development of the story and also allows for the characters within an Epic piece of theatre to appear alterable by their situation. This in turn builds fluidity within a play and encourages rational thought on the spectator's part. Therefore with use of narration, perceived objectivity, alterable characters and montage Brecht aimed to create a theatre which stimulated the mind and allowed the spectator to sit back and evaluate the fable before them.

How Does Music Factor into Epic Theatre?

Music is the perfect vehicle for Epic Theatre because of its episodal quality. With Epic Theatre each scene is designed to stand on its own, in much the same way each individual piece of music can stand on its own. Brecht additionally included a section on Epic Music in his notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. In these notes he deconstructs the role music plays in Epic Theatre by contrasting Dramatic Music with Epic Music. I will break down and discuss these roles in the remainder of this chapter.

The Music Dishes Up Vs The Music Communicates

With Dramatic Theatre (specifically the opera, the musical, and the play with music) music's main function is to serve as either a device to heighten the emotional content of the play or to create a spectacle or purely entertaining aspect to the piece. Epic Music is not interested in dishing up emotions or a making a spectacle, but is used to communicate an argument or point of reason to the spectator. As Brecht writes in reference to his songs in *The Threepenny Opera*:

> In such ways the music, just because it took up a purely emotional attitude and spurned none of the stock narcotic attractions, became an active collaborator in the stripping bare of the middleclass corpus of ideas. It became, so to speak a muck-raker, an informer, a nark. [42]

The music in *The Threepenny Opera* adopted the role of a reporter and divulged ideas and secrets of the middle classes which were controversial and not typically discussed. By eliminating the spectacle of the music, Brecht engaged with the communicative and informative properties of it. This allowed for the message of the song to be clear and unhindered by unnecessary ornamentation. Whereas Dramatic music is used for entertainment or emotional needs, Epic Music aims to uncover an idea and relate it to the audience.

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[42] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 85-86.

Music which Heightens the Text Vs Music which Sets Forth the Text

Epic Theatre urges a separation of its elements; therefore the text and the music are to function as two separate elements of the theatre. It is easy to see discrepancies in the ability to keep text and music separate within the confines of a song and is something I will explore further in the conclusion of this study. In regards to maintaining a separation between music and text Esslin asserts that:

> The musical numbers are no longer smuggled in at the point when the emotional charge of a scene rises to a climax and speech merges into song – but are introduced as entirely distinct ingredients of the play, which interrupt its flow, break the illusion, and thereby render the action 'strange'. [43]

By allowing a song to seem strange it will bring attention to that moment in the plot. Thus Brecht and his composers commonly placed their songs at junctures, not to heighten the mood, but to draw attention to the surrounding situation.   Brecht felt that Dramatic Theatre's integration of its elements allowed for each element to become lost within the grand structure of the piece. Dramatic Music functioned as an aid to emotionally heighten the text and was integrated to such an extent that it could not function on its own, but only as part of the greater scene. Epic Music, however, sets forth the text in the same way that an exclamation point emphasizes words on a page. The music can function on its own and may even contradict the given emotions within a scene to set them forth to a greater extent by creating an alienation between music and

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[43] Esslin, M. *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, 118.

text. Where Dramatic Music works with cohesion within the theatrical structure, Epic Music stands on its own within a piece of theatre.

Music which Proclaims the Text Vs Music which Takes the Text for Granted

Epic Theatre separates all of its elements, whether it is the viewer from the emotions, the actor from the character, or the elements from the production. Music can aid in this separation as long as it is not subject to *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or "integrated work of art"). Dramatic Theatre aims to integrate all of its elements to form one cohesive unit, but this can create a clutter of text, music, and action and, as Brecht states in his article "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre", the spectator will always wonder "Which is the pretext for what?: is the music the pretext for the events on stage, or are these the pretext for the music"? [44] The music of Dramatic Theatre works to aid the text and heighten the emotions. Epic Theatre's music can at times work against the text and will assume that the text can stand on its own. As Brecht writes in his essay on music and Epic Theatre, "it would be particularly useful, for instance, to have the actors play *against* the emotion which the music called forth". [45] Brecht is therefore not interested in using the music to coincide with the sentiments of the spoken word (or sung word for that matter), but is focused on the effect the music will have on the spectator alone.

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[44] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 37.
[45] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 90.

Music Which Illustrates Vs Music which Takes a Position

Since Dramatic Music works in conjunction with all of the other elements of the piece, it aids in the overall portrayal of the play. But at no point can the music stand alone to make its own comment. Epic Music often takes a firm stand and clearly demonstrates this to the spectator. For example, with reference to the music in *The Threepenny Opera* Brecht writes: "The criminals showed, sometimes through the music itself, that their sensations, feelings and prejudices were the same as those of the average citizen and theatregoer". [46] The music in this case is used as a means for the characters to express their thoughts on a particular situation without having to act them out for the audience. The songs in *The Threepenny Opera*, like in most of Brecht's work, operate as a means for the characters, the actors, or Brecht himself to construct a commentary on the faults in society and thereby incite the audience to make the necessary changes.

Music which Paints the Psychological Situation Vs Music which Gives the Attitude

Dramatic Music works to heighten the emotional state of a character and this helps to convey the overall psychological state of the play. For example, a comedic opera will open with an overture that is light and whimsical, whereas a serious opera will open with music that evokes horror or vengeance. Epic Music on the other hand

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[46] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 85.

does not play on the emotions but gives an expression of the theatrical piece to come. As Esslin declares:

> Brecht used to point to the way street singers render the more vulgar kind of popular song with large and simple gestures. His own 'songs' were designed to achieve a similar effect on actor and audience alike by crystallizing an essential, fundamental attitude and exhibiting it with the utmost clarity: despair or resignation, defiance or submission. [47]

The *gestus* in Epic Theatre allows for a certain distance to be maintained from actor to character and thus from character to audience. *Gestus* is the idea of using a gesture either physically or within the music instead of creating an emotion within a character. In essence, these gestures are to correspond to an emotion to show an expression instead of a feeling. *Gestus* is used quite often in Epic Theatre as a means of distancing the audience by interrupting the flow of the acting style. *Gestus* is very commonly used within the musical numbers to allow the actors to keep their distance from the feelings evoked within a song. Instead of emoting while singing, an actor is expected to adopt a *gestus* which will exhibit the general attitude of the song. Brecht's music therefore operates as commentary on the character instead of enhancement or means to communicate their feelings.

Gestus is a tricky term in Epic Theatre because one is unable to garner a clear definition of the word. Brecht and Kurt Weill, the composer who helped to create the concept, had differing opinions on its purpose and Brecht repeatedly contradicted

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[47] Esslin, M. *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, 124.

himself with his own definitions of the word. This is further mirrored by the countless

academics who have strived to tackle the term only to achieve a similarly vague

definition, a definition founded on no conclusive evidence or with glaring contradictions

to other theories already published on the term. Kenneth Fowler, in my opinion, is the

only researcher who has provided essential information on the term, with his

conclusions stating that the word cannot be defined due to inconclusive or contradictory

evidence. [48]   The modern theatrical practitioner or researcher who is tackling this issue

of *gestus* and music is left to his or her own devices.

Therefore when summing up the ideas and techniques behind Epic Theatre one

can find its roots with Aristotle. Brecht reconstructed Aristotle's theory of Epic prose

and formed it into his own style of theatre which was a reaction against the Dramatic

Theatre of the time. It is important to stress that Brecht did not see a complete

opposition between Epic and Dramatic theatre and did believe that the two could coexist

within the same piece of theatrical work. His primary reason for drawing up a compare

and contrast list was to illustrate the shifts of emphasis between the two forms. For the

remainder of my paper I will be placing my chosen case studies against the concepts I

have outlined above. These include the use of narration and a fable structure, the ability

of a piece to engage with reason instead of relying heavily on the emotions and the idea

of the montage and alienation effect. Also essential to the Epic format is the idea of

gestus which I will endeavour to handle as carefully as one can without a concrete

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[48] For an in depth look at *gestus* in Brecht's theories and music and the various discrepancies of the definition of the term take a look at Kenneth Fowler's *Received Truths: Bertolt Brecht and the Problem of Gestus and Musical Meaning* (New York: AMS Press, 1991). Ultimately he concluded that *gestus* could not be defined due to contradictory and vague definitions by Brecht, Weill and consecutive academics.

definition. These concepts will be directly laced into the use of music within each case

study and I will closely analyse how and if the musical numbers do adhere to the above

concepts. With the basics of Epic Theatre and Epic Music now outlined I will turn to

one of Brecht's most acclaimed and denounced pieces of music and theatre, *The*

Threepenny Opera.

Synopsis:

The Threepenny Opera opens with an overture followed by the famous song "The

Ballad of Mac the Knife" in which the spectator is introduced to the main character

Macheath.   We then meet Mr. and Mrs. Peachum along with their outfitting shop for

beggars. In this shop the Peachums ensure that a client looks as pitiful and as poor as

possible so that he can attain the highest amount of cash.   Their daughter, Polly, is

introduced in the next scene in her wedding with Macheath in an old barn with

appropriated wedding supplies. Tiger Brown, the resident policeman, joins the wedding

and the friendly bond between the criminal and law enforcer is highlighted.   After the

wedding Polly tells her parents of her marriage, who do not take it well and thus

contrive a plan to separate the two. Due to Peachum's threats, Macheath is forced to

leave town. Instead of fleeing, Macheath finds comfort in the whores, led by his old

flame Jenny, who ultimately helps in his arrest.   While Macheath is behind bars, we

learn of his second wife, Lucy, the daughter of Brown, who helps to free Macheath.

Peachum is extremely distraught upon learning of Macheath's escape and threatens

Brown to use his clientele of beggars to disrupt the Coronation, if Macheath is not

captured and put to death.   Brown has no choice but to capture his old friend Macheath,

which is not difficult as he is found once again with the whores.   At the moment when

Macheath is to be hung a royal official arrives on horseback and grants Macheath's

pardon along with an award of a castle, pension and hereditary peerage straight from the

queen. The company sings in joyous unison, with the reminder that real life does not always end so pleasantly.

Song Listing:

Overture (*Ouverture*) - Orchestra

Prologue: a fair in Soho

1.   "The Ballad of Mac the Knife" (*Moritat vom Mackie Messer*) – A Street Singer

Act1

Scene 1: Peachum's outfitting shop for beggars

2.   "Peachum's Morning Hymn" (*Morgenchoral des Peachum*) – Mr. Peachum

3.   "The 'No They Can't' Song" (*Anstatt-daß-Song*) – Mr. Peachum & Mrs.

Peachum

Scene 2: a bare stable

4.   "Wedding Song" (*Hochzeitslied*) – Three Gangsters

5.   "Pirate Jenny" (*Seeräuberjenny*) – Polly

6.   "The Cannon Song" (*Kanonensong*) – Macheath & Brown

7.   "Love Song" (*Liebslied*) – Macheath & Polly

Scene 3: Peachum's outfitting shop for beggars

8.   "Barbara Song" (*Barbara-Song*) – Polly

9.   Finale of act one (*Dreigroschenfinale*) – Mr. Peachum, Mrs. Peachum & Polly

Act 2

Scene 1: the stable

10.   "Polly's Song" (*Pollys Lied*) – Polly

11. "Melodrama" (*Melodram*) – Macheath

12. "The Ballad of Sexual Obsession" (*Ballade von der Sexuellen Hörigkeit*) – Mrs.

Peachum

Scene 2: a whorehouse in Turnbridge

13. "Ballad of Immoral Earnings" (*Zuhälterballade*) – Macheath & Jenny

Scene 3: the cells in the Old Bailey

14. "Ballad of Good Living" (*Ballade vom Angenehmen Leben*) - Macheath

15. "Jealousy Duet" (*Eifersuchtsduett*) – Polly & Lucy

16. Finale of act two (*Dreigroschenfinale*) – Macheath, Mrs. Peachum or Jenny

Act 3

Scene 1: Peachum's outfitting shop for beggars

17. "The Insufficiency of Human Endeavour" (*Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit*

menschilchen Strebens) – Mr. Peachum

18. "Solomon Song" (*Salomon-Song*) - Jenny

Scene 2: a young girl's room in the Old Bailey

Scene 3: in a death cell

19. "Call from the Grave" (*Ruf aus der Gruft*) – Macheath

20. "Grave Inscription" (*Grabschrift*) – Macheath

21. "Walk to the Gallows" (*Gang zum Galgen*) – Orchestra & Mr. Peachum

22. Finale of act three (*Dreigroschenfinale*) – Company & Chorus

The Threepenny Opera opened at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin in

August and completed its first season in April with 250 performances. [49] It was Brecht

and Weill's second collaboration, their first being *Little Mahagonny* for the Baden

Baden festival. The writing for *The Threepenny Opera* was rushed as it was

commissioned at the beginning of May in 1928 and expected to open less than four

months later. [50] *The Threepenny Opera* was based on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*

which was translated from English to German for the project by Elisabeth Hauptmann.

Both Brecht and Weill described *The Threepenny Opera* as a prototype opera. [51]

The concept of a prototype opera refers to the idea that Brecht and Weill were looking

to reinvent the operatic genre. With *The Threepenny Opera* they were looking to lay the

foundations of a structure of theatre that would amend what they deemed as the current

faults of operatic conventions.   One of these faults included the suggestion of opera

being culinary; the idea that all of the elements of theatre joined together would form

one cohesive unit that presented itself as overly digestible. Brecht and Weill did not

intend to use *The Threepenny Opera* to make a mockery of *The Beggar's Opera,* but

were using the operatic conventions available to them in order to bring attention to

techniques commonly used in the genre.   Operatic conventions used in *The Threepenny*

Opera included structuring with the use of music (such as the use of overtures and

finales), song formatting (inclusive of duets, trios, harmonies, choruses and patter

songs), as well as the use of a *Deus Ex Machina* ending. Brecht was asked by Giorgio

[49] Hinton, S. "The Premiere and After" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht,* Second Edition eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 57.
[50] McNeff, S. "The Threepenny Opera" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht,* eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 82.
[51] Calico, J. *Brecht at the Opera,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008) 34.

Strehler in an interview in 1955 if *The Threepenny Opera* was a mockery of opera and

Brecht replied, "Only in so far as grand opera still persists". [52] In a sense, Brecht is

commenting on the fact that opera, at times, is a mockery of itself and that *The*

Threepenny Opera was not intended as a mockery under those terms. Opera can be

seen as a mockery of itself in the sense of its unrealistic use of continuous music, highly

dramatic acting, elaborate sets and costume and storylines heavy with inconsistencies or

improbable plots. Brecht firmly felt that opera had not made an attempt to

contemporise itself since the "revolutionary bourgeoisie's opera" of Mozart's

generation. [53] This of course is a very strong statement that does not acknowledge the

New Music movement that Weill and Eisler were both part of.

Due to the collaborative nature of Brecht and his associates and the large amount

of changes and omissions to *The Threepenny Opera* script*,* it is hard to get a true sense

of what Brecht and Weill had intended in terms of the spectators' reception or the

impact of the piece in the cultural climate. It is apparent that neither Brecht nor Weill

had expected it to be the success that it was. The notes to *The Threepenny Opera* do not

give a clear guideline as to what Brecht and Weill had been working towards during that

summer of 1928, as Kim Kowalke rightly affirms, they "were intended as a corrective to

the performance practice that had accounted for the unexpected success that Brecht (and

his Marxist critics) now viewed as 'mistaken'". [54] It is clear from Kowalke's quote that

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[52] Bunge, H.J. (transcribed) "Transcript" *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects,* ed Willett, J. (London: Methuen, 1977)103.
[53] Brecht, B. *Bertolt Brecht Journals 1934-55 (Diaries, Letters and Essays),* ed Rorrison, H. (New York: Routledge, 1996) 427.
[54] Kowalke, K. "Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice" *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 5:1 (March, 1993) 74-75.

Brecht did not expect *The Threepenny Opera* to be as successful as it was, in fact

monetary success in the mainstream theatre was exactly what *The Threepenny Opera*

was commenting against. *The Threepenny Opera* celebrated the hardships of the lower

classes and beggars, which made it an unlikely candidate to be welcomed by the

middle-class citizens of the theatre audience. It seemed apparent to Brecht and (his

Marxist critics) that the message of the lower class struggle of the beggars in *The*

Threepenny Opera had not reached the consciousness of the well to-do theatre crowds

that were engorging themselves on *The Threepenny Opera* frenzy. But other than these

unreliable notes to *The Threepenny Opera,* there is little to work from when piecing

together the collaborative nature of Brecht and Weill's work on *The Threepenny Opera*

which makes it difficult to produce conclusive arguments concerning Brecht's theories

on Epic Theatre and their relation to this play.

For my research I will primarily be drawing from the Universal Edition of *The*

Threepenny Opera vocal score and John Willett and Ralph Manheim's translation of the

play which has been heavily revised by Brecht from its premiere. Due to the lack of

other primary resources I will refer to Brecht's notes to *The Threepenny Opera*

regarding the function of music, despite their antithetical sentiments in regards to the

initial writing of the play. Another important source is Kim Kowalke's compelling

theories regarding Brecht and Weill's use of music in numerous articles. The two most

prevalent being "Brecht and Music: theory and practice of theatre" in which he

addresses the significance of music in Brecht's theories and "Singing Brecht vs. Brecht

Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice" in which he considers how the Epic

techniques should be used when performing Brecht's music. For the duration of my paper I will refer to the songs in *The Threepenny Opera* by their English names as indicated in the chart at the beginning of this chapter.

In this chapter I will look at the various techniques used by Brecht to establish his theories on Epic Theatre within the piece of *The Threepenny Opera.* One of Brecht's primary devices for inducing the alienation effect was to keep a separation of the songs from script or spoken dialogue, so I will identify the moments at which this technique is used in the play. Secondly, Brecht theorized that the actor must maintain a separation from his or her character and that the songs should help keep this distinction. I will also highlight the times the meaning of a song works against the orchestration of the music thus allowing the lyrics to be prominent over the music. Another aspect I will touch on is the fact that Brecht employed untrained voices to execute the music of the piece. And lastly, I will explore the operatic techniques used in *The Threepenny Opera* and how this relates to traditional opera. With each of these sections I will argue as to how they directly relate to Brecht's theories on Epic Theatre and how these theories are then reflected in the development and production of *The Threepenny Opera.*

Separation of Songs from Script

Brecht maintained that the various elements of the theatre should be kept separate from one another to prevent one element from encroaching upon another and ultimately

making the entire production overly digestible. He found fault with operas and musicals

that seamlessly incorporated music and speech as one fluid unit and writes in his

"*Threepenny Opera* Notes":

> Nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has
>
> left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels – plain speech,
>
> heightened speech, and singing – must always remain distinct. [55]

The three levels of speech that Brecht is referring to in this statement can commonly be

seen in most musicals, but can also be witnessed in operettas, operas and some straight

plays. Plain speech is what any common actor would use to deliver his or her lines.

Plain speech is more exaggerated than everyday speech because it is used for

communication across a large space. Heightened speech can come in two forms, but is

more exaggerated than plain speech and often incorporates rhythm or melody. There is

the heightened speech of opera or operetta referred to as recitative.   This includes a

balance between the spoken voice and the singing voice with a loose rhythmical melody

supported by block chords. There is also the heightened speech of musical theatre and

straight theatre. This involves an actor exaggerating his or her words, bringing out the

musical timbre of a line and can be underscored by music. Brecht has a perfect example

of heightened speech in the "Melodrama" between Polly and Macheath in which the

two deliver their lines over scored instrumental music. In order to indicate a shift from

plain speech to song, Brecht used what he termed as the "song lighting". Ten of the

Twenty Two songs in *The Threepenny Opera* specify the "song lighting" which entails

a golden light projected on the stage, the organ lit up, three lamps lowered from above

and a sign with the name or content of the song displayed. The lighting of the organ is

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[55] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects,* (London: Methuen, 1977) 131-132.

especially important. It acts as a constant reminder of musical production and shatters any illusion of the music arriving from within the world of the play.

Another tactic Brecht used to maintain a separation of the songs from the script was the placement of certain songs in front of the curtain outside of the context of the scene. This can be seen with both the finale of act two and the "Solomon Song". Neither of these two songs progress their respective scenes, but operate as a comment on the action of the play or on society itself.   For example, prior to the finale of act two, Brown confronts Mr. Peachum with news that Macheath has escaped from jail. The scene ends with Brown assembling his men in order to perform a search for the escaped criminal. The curtain falls, the "song lighting" is employed and Macheath and Mrs. Peachum (or Jenny, if referring to the Willett and Manheim translation) step out from behind the curtain. They sing a declaration that morals can only be had by those rich enough to have them with the words: "Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance in keeping its humanity repressed". [56]   Therefore, the finale of act two has little to do with the action of the scene before it. The same is true for the "Solomon Song" which is also performed in front of the curtain by Jenny with a hurdy gurdy. In this song she compares the character of Macheath to historical figures.   This song is preceded by Peachum's finale verse of "The Insufficiency of Human Endeavour" in which Peachum avoids being arrested, which once again exhibits the contrast between the content of the scene and the song following it. Both of these songs act as individual scenes within the action of the play and contribute to the montage.

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[56] Brecht, B. "The Threepenny Opera" *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 55.

Secondly, many of the song titles include the word *Ballade* (ballad) or *Lied* (song) in their title. This calls attention to the fact that the characters are singing and that these songs are not the inner monologues of the character's emotions or plain speech that has been swept away into music. The use of song or ballad in the title serves as a reminder not only to the audience (in cases when the song title is projected on the stage) but also for the performer to remain aware of the act of delivering a song. This is affirmed by Brecht's statement in his *Threepenny Opera* Notes, "In no case therefore should singing take place where words are prevented by excess feeling". [57] Brecht asserts that the *gestus* and the lyrics should be the only methods used in a piece of music, and that the actor does not need to emote his or her character's feelings during an aria. He theorizes that excess feeling will override the lyrics, which will in turn interrupt communication between the playwright and the audience.

One exception falls with the song "The Insufficiency of Human Endeavour". In this song Peachum is interrogated by Brown who threatens to arrest him and the beggars. Peachum instructs the beggars to pretend they are band members and thus the song emerges from the context of the scene instead of as a separate aspect. Although Brecht aimed to combat this by including the "song lighting" for this number, nevertheless the music is derived from the action of the scene, and a sense of separation is diminished.

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[57] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* ed Willett, J. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 44.

In order for Brecht to maintain a separation of music from the script he employed several techniques, the most common being the "song lighting" which helped delineate a song from the plain speech text of the play. He also placed songs in front of the curtain, with content that is removed from the plot of the play and uses words such as song or ballad as a reminder of the act of delivering a song. Although most of the music in *The Threepenny Opera* follows one or more of these methods, in some cases as with "The Insufficiency of Human Endeavour", the song derived organically from the plot and text which adds a culinary component to the play.

Separation of Character from Actor

Brecht found fault with operas and musicals that used music as a means for a character to divulge his or her emotional state. He theorized that the actor should not become emotionally involved with his or her character. The concept of *gestus* was introduced to facilitate this distancing between actor and character. As I mentioned in my chapter on Epic Theatre, it is quite difficult to give a definition of *gestus* since neither Brecht nor Weill gave clear explanations of the concept. Kowalke offers the theory that *gestus* was originally used as a means to fix the poetry to a defined set of rhythm, tempo, attitude, and to give a means to dictate pauses: "In other words, the composer thought that *gestus* in music could articulate what the text does not make explicit and thereby provide a subtext ready-made for the performer". [58]   According to Kowalke, g*estus* in music was thereby a means to fix the text in such a way as to ensure

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[58] Kowalke, K. "Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing", 66-67.

that the performer had only one way to perform the lyrics, which serves as a means of guidance for the lyricist to administer over the singer. The *gestus* or attitude of a song may or may not be evident in the lyrics, which is why the music may divulge more than the text is able to. For example if the lyrics were quite cheerful, but the *gestus* or attitude was distraught (perhaps played as if it were a funeral dirge) this would create an interesting juxtaposition that could make the audience question the validity of the lyrics which they are listening to. So, through use of *gestus* Brecht endeavoured to create a separation from the emotions of the character and the actor playing the character.

Some examples which emphasize a separation of character from actor include the fact that the lyrics for both "Pirate Jenny" and "Barbara Song" were written eighteen months before work for *The Threepenny Opera* began which reinforces the concept that the songs were not meant to be consolidated aspects of the plot. [59] Also, it was common for songs to be exchanged from one character to another. Kowalke points out that the songs are interchangeable because of the idea that the characters are reporting instead of experiencing, which is derived from Brecht's statement "The singer becomes a reporter whose private feelings must remain a private affair". [60] The effect of this interchangeability maintains that no song truly belongs to one character and therefore the songs cannot function as an introspective into the character's psyche. Kowalke uses the "Barbara Song" as an example of interchangeability because both the characters Lucy and Polly took turns singing the song throughout the original run of the

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[59] Willett, J. *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches,* (London: Methuen, 1998) 167.
[60] Kowalke, K. "Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing", 76.

show. [61] This concept of interchangeability is a method which allowed for a separation between character and actor. The song only belonged to the play, and therefore the lyrics and the mood of the song can only be loosely related to any character and can only function as a mere indicator of mood instead of inner-psyche. However, I would argue that the accompaniment for the "Barbara Song" actually reinforces the relationship between the character and the music. The opening of the song was written for solo piano, so as Polly stands alone in front of her parents telling them of her marriage (and lost virginity) the piano stands alone without the support of the rest of the orchestra thus mirroring her isolation.

"The Ballad of Mac the Knife" however, is an example of a separation of character from actor as it introduces the character Macheath before the spectator even sees the actor playing him. This maintains that the character and actor will keep a distance from one another. The spectator is given his background and can form an opinion of the character before the actor appears on stage. "The Ballad of Mac the Knife" is performed by the character of The Street Singer who only appears in this one moment of the play. He is directing the song to a group of on-lookers as he relates the story of the murderer Macheath and all of the crimes that this character had committed prior to the action of the play.

This directly relates to Brecht's article "Street Scene" in which he details the optimal performance as that of a person relating a tale on a street corner. Brecht used

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[61] Kowalke, K. "Brecht and Music" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht,* eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 258: footnote 29.

the basic incident of an "eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place" as a situational example for his Epic Theatre. [62]   The importance of this type of performance is its ability to allow the by-stander to form his or her own opinion of the incident.   The eyewitness supplies facts or details, but never attempts to offer a realistic or identical portrayal of the characters in the accident. Although the eyewitness has his or her own interpretation of the accident, it is important in the Epic Theatre that these are played out in such a way as to allow the by-standers to develop their own varied thoughts.   The reason that this format is necessary in Brecht's theatre is because once an actor begins to create an illusion then the theatre is no longer a theatre but becomes part of this illusion. The stage is no longer a stage, but develops into the imaginary world of the illusion, the actors are no longer themselves but are fabricated characters and any emotion evoked in the spectator is purely a by-product of something fictional. This is why Brecht used the street corner situation because at no point does the eyewitness pretend he is a character in the accident and therefore the street corner remains the street corner, and never transforms into something else. Brecht suggested that the eyewitness was not there to coerce the spectator to experience but was there to impart information. In fact if the eyewitness did try to force an experience on the spectator through use of imitation his story would lose credibility. So there should be a clear separation between the demonstrator and the incident that he or she is demonstrating.   Also, the use of the street scene model creates characters that are derived from their actions, instead of their emotions or inner psyche. The only information supplied about the victims is any injuries that they suffered as well as their physical appearance. All of the characters are judged and developed from the

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[62] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 122.

superficial information given to them by the reporter. With the street scene model

Brecht looked to turn to "the very simplest 'natural' theatre". [63]

Therefore in "The Ballad of Mac the Knife," the Street Singer becomes the

eyewitness and Macheath's sordid past takes the place of the incident. The spectators

are doubled in the characters on the stage as well as the members of the audience. "The

Ballad of Mac the Knife" differs from the Street Scene model in the sense that the Street

Singer does not double the actions of Macheath, but only details them. The Street

Singer does however have an agenda, and uses this song as a means to deliver his

interpretation of the character Macheath. The lyrics of "The Ballad of Mac the Knife"

are quite grotesque, but the musical style of the ballad is light-hearted. The

juxtaposition of the bloodthirsty and the effervescent allows the Street Singer to present

the facts about Macheath in a relatively detached manner.

Since "The Ballad of Mac the Knife" was the last song to be written for the show

and inserted at the final moment, it reinforces the idea that the songs were not written as

amalgamated aspects of the script and could be inserted at the last moment and would

still serve their function of distancing within the Epic Theatre model. An exception lies

with the song "Call from the Grave." This song fails to keep the actor and character

separate. The score is marked *molto agitat* which musically translates to "with much

agitation" and this is very much the sentiment of the song. This is the first human

emotion that Macheath portrays; up until this point he is void of feeling or concern.

This is a private moment for Macheath since he is alone in his cell, so the spectator is

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[63] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 126.

assured that this display of feelings is not for the benefit of another character but purely a by-product of Macheath's situation in the face of his own mortality.

In order for Brecht to create a separation between the character and the actor, he employed two primary aspects of his Epic Theatre theories in his music. The first is the concept of g*estus* which created a fixed attitude that disallowed an actor to display a character's emotions. The second is the utilization of the "Street Scene" model which simulated that of a reporter detailing the factual events of an incident. In addition Brecht maintained that the songs should be interchangeable, which prevented any one song belonging to any one character. Brecht was not able to keep the character and the actor separate in every occasion as can be seen with the paralleling of the solitary piano accompaniment to the desolate character of Polly with the "Barbara Song" and the doubling of emotions of character and music in the "Call from the Grave".

Music Working Against the Lyrics

It could be argued that music has an intense impact on humanity because it is one of the few forms of communication that can be universally interpreted no matter what one's language or culture is. Both Brecht and Weill were highly aware of the role that music played within the theatre as indicated by Weill's comment to a friend in 1929:

Music has more impact than words. Brecht knows it and he knows I know. But

we never talk about it. If it came out in the open, we couldn't work with each

other any more. [64]

This hits at the root of Brecht's struggle with music within his Epic theories. A large

majority of Brecht's writings, especially after the success of *The Threepenny Opera,*

were devoted to preventing the music from overtaking the lyrics. The above statement

foreshadows Brecht and Weill's working relationship. Once Brecht and Weill became

successful with the works of *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of*

Mahagonny, it was clear that one of the most successful and widely popular aspects of

these shows was the music.

Words can be difficult to understand through the sung voice which is why it is not

uncommon for operas to provide subtitles even if the text is in the native language of the

spectators. Therefore in order for the lyrics or the meaning to hold their own against the

music Brecht theorized that the lyrics must at times work against the music and as

Brecht states in his *"Threepenny Opera* Notes":

As for the melody, he must not follow it blindly: 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. [65]

With this statement, Brecht encouraged his actors to speak-sing the songs so that his

poetry would not be lost within the confines of the melody. Brecht felt that the lyrics

would be pronounced if they worked against the music, by employing such dynamics as

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[64] Kowalke, K. "Brecht and Music" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 249.
[65] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, 131-132.

speaking at moments instead of singing, singing a different rhythm than what was dictated, or by singing a different melody at moments in the song. For example, it is perfectly common in opera for a vowel to be modified in order to fit a note. If the word "meet" were to fall on the high register of a melodic line, then the singer would be expected to pronounce the word as "maht" since "ahh" is a open vowel and easier to sing, even though this would sacrifice the clarity of the lyrics. In opera the emphasis of the performance is centred on the music and the proper way it should be delivered to such an extent that the lyrics are shown little regard. This is why it is common for an operatic aria to repeat the same few sentences over and over. The aim of an aria is to provide the singer with an apparatus to showcase his or her talent and to give a general meaning to further the plot of the opera.

Brecht, being the poet that he was, found fault in this careless handling of text and sought to work against these constraints. This may be why "Walk to the Gallows" is constructed as a monologue over music. "Walk to the Gallows" falls at the most climactic point in the play right before Macheath is to be hung. It consists of a monologue delivered by Mr. Peachum over instrumental music, without any pretext of melody to be sung. With the exception of a couple of songs beginning while the actors are finishing their lines and the fragment of the "Love Song" with heightened speech, this is the only moment in the play that sets spoken dialogue over music. This distinguishes this section of the play because of this deviation and thus heightens the action in the scene, building a sharp contrast to the *Deus ex Machina* ending which follows it.

Some examples of a contrasting of text against music can be seen when Brecht

and Weill juxtaposed general meanings of songs against their respective melodies.

"The Ballad of Mac the Knife" is a prime example of the lyrics, or the meaning of a

song, working against the melody. The music of "The Ballad of Mac the Knife" is quite

simple, catchy, and jaunty. But the lyrics touch on a man that is not only a grisly killer,

but also a rapist, arsonist and child molester. Another example is "Peachum's Morning

Hymn" which alienates the familiar by using an original melody from *The Beggar's*

Opera with new lyrics and accompaniment. Since *The Beggar's Opera* was well known

at the time and all of the melodies were derived from popular music, it is likely that the

spectator would have been familiar with the melody of this song. Since the lyrics and

the orchestration were new to the listener it would have set them forth from the melody.

Another example is the "Wedding Song" which is sung during the wedding scene,

but the music is reminiscent of a funeral dirge. The song has a pub-like quality as the

characters shout out cheers and insults throughout the song. This pub-like dirge works

against the concept of the commitment and joy that are typically part of a wedding.

Under the heading of the "Wedding Song" in the Universal Edition of the vocal score is

written the direction "first of all sung a capella, embarrassed and bored. Later possibly

in this version" which Stephen Hinton interprets as first sung a capella and then joined

by accompaniment. [66] This is also affirmed by the stage directions in the Willett and

Manheim translation which indicate that "Three men rise and sing hesitantly, weakly

and uncertainly" after they are prodded by Macheath to produce wedding entertainment

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[66] Hinton, S. "Matters of Intellectual Property: Sources and Genesis of 'Die Dreigroschenoper'" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 34

for the Reverend. Since the beginning of this song is unaccompanied, it would give the

spectator a sense of amateurism with a trio who had not rehearsed or were improvising.

The idea of an unaccompanied beginning does allow the music to develop organically

from the text especially since the "song lighting" is not used on this number, which falls

out of line with Brecht's theories. The one aspect of this song that does separate the text

from the music is the grinding of the lyrics with the death march pace of the eventual

accompaniment. Ultimately the irony of this song is the idea of the juxtaposition of the

dark sentiment and lament of this song against the jovial aspects of a wedding, which

encourages the spectator to question the validity of the wedding and the union of Polly

and Macheath.

Another musical situation that allows the spectator to question the marriage of

Polly and Macheath is the use of the "Cannon Song" and the "Love Song" in the

wedding sequence. The "Cannon Song" is a duet between Brown and Macheath and the

"Love Song" is between Polly and Macheath. The "Cannon Song" consists of three

verses that are fast-paced, sung in unison with block chords that have a march-like

quality. The "Love Song", in contrast is very short, has no recurring catchy melody and

is quite disharmonious, edging on atonal. When these two songs are compared against

each other it gives the sense that Macheath is closer to Brown than he is to his wife.

The length and festivity of the "Cannon Song" with Brown in comparison to the harsh

"Love Song" and death like "Wedding Song" create a subtext which is not apparent in

the text and foreshadows Macheath's ultimate infidelity to his wife.   This subtext

reoccurs in the finale of act three in a musical motive that works against the lyrics.

After Macheath has been freed, Polly sings in delight commenting on how happy she is, yet after her exclamation the orchestra responds with the introduction from the "Barbara Song" which reminds the viewer that Polly was essentially taken advantage of by Macheath. The "Barbara Song" itself is not upbeat, surely not an appropriate response to the effervescent Polly in the act three finale. This serves as a type of foreshadowing or decrypting of Polly's actual emotions towards Macheath and her relationship. So with the use of the funeral-like "Wedding Song," the dissonant and short "Love Song" in conjunction with the motif of the "Barbara Song" in the finale, Brecht and Weill create a subtext which allows the spectator to question the fortitude and infallibility of Polly and Macheath's marriage.

An exception of the music working against the lyrics is observable with the song "Jealousy Duet". This song displays the catty confrontations between two of Macheath's wives Lucy and Polly. The lyrics are impregnated with bickering and insults and the music mirrors these sentiments. With quick back and forth exchanges in the duet and harsh harmonies in the chorus, it gives the sense that like their personalities, their melodic and harmonic lines clash as well. In order for Brecht to allow his lyrics to stand forth from the music, he encouraged the lyrics and music to work against each other. At times he called for the actors to sing or speak against the music or he set the context of the text against the quality of the music. This not only ensured clarity of the lyrics, but also allowed for particular sub-texts or attitudes to make themselves apparent within the music. At times though, the music would work in

conjunction with the lyrics as can be seen with the "Jealousy Duet" where the sentiments of the characters are doubled in the harmonies and pace of the music.

Sung with Untrained Voices

None of the performers in the original cast were operatically trained singers. Most of them were actors or at the most cabaret singers. But one is not to assume that the music in *The Threepenny Opera* is simple. It means that Weill was faced with a challenge when composing the music for this piece. When writing for untrained singers one has to take many obstacles into consideration. Most untrained singers are unable to read sheet music with great skill, which means that Weill needed to compose music that was easily learned by ear or simplistic when written out. He also needed to take into consideration the untrained singer's range (which would typically be smaller than a trained singer) and their lack of breath control (which means phrases would need to be smaller to prevent the singer from taking a breath in the middle of a sentence). Also, an untrained singer would typically not be able to sing with as much power as a trained singer and thus Weill would need to be conscious of when and where he could employ the use of the entire orchestra. These are just some of the complications that Weill needed to take into consideration while composing the music for *The Threepenny Opera.*

Weill's brilliance is showcased with "The Ballad of Mac the Knife". The melody is simple and does not deviate with the progressing verses. The accompaniment however, does change and becomes increasingly complex as the song progresses. This ensures that the song will not become monotonous, but at the same time is accessible to an untrained voice. [67] In fact it is worth noting that Weill never repeated the same accompaniment more than once in the entirety of the show without variation. [68] Since with repetition the ear will become familiar with a melody, thus making it easy to remember, or catchy, Weill needed to ensure that the listener did not become bored with the melody by hearing it too many times. Weill engaged with this dilemma by repeating melodies, but not accompaniments, which in turn is also beneficial for the untrained voice. Another technique Weill employed to help the singers was to double their melodic line with an instrument in the orchestra. For example in the finale of act one the trombone doubles Mr. Peachum's vocal line to offer support to the singing actor. [69] This maintains that the actor playing Mr. Peachum would always be able to locate his melody within the orchestra and also enhanced the actor's voice by giving the melodic line extra volume. By using the above procedures, Weill composed complex music for an untrained voice, which in turn allowed *The Threepenny Opera* to function as a blending between opera and theatre.

Dealing with a majority of non-singers did present a problem for Brecht and Weill. Originally the character Lucy had an aria, but this had to be omitted once it was

[67] McNeff, S. "The Threepenny Opera" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 87.
[68] Abbott, G. "The 'Dreigroschen' sound" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 169.
[69] Abbott, G. "The 'Dreigroschen' sound" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 173.

apparent that the actress Kate Kühl could not handle the piece vocally. Another

example of this can be seen with "Reprieved" passage in the finale of act three.

Macheath, who is traditionally cast as a baritone, should be cast as a tenor since the

melodic line falls quite high for a baritone, especially one with little vocal training. [70]

These incidences show that the use of untrained voices did at times interfere with the

music originally written for *The Threepenny Opera* and that changes had to be made to

fit the limitations of the untrained voice.

But working with untrained singers did fall in conjunction with Brecht's theories

on Epic Theatre. The goal of a professionally trained operatic singer is to produce an

aria that is absolutely seamless and without fault while at the same time making it

appear is if it is completely effortless. This creates a somewhat inhuman task as well as

effect. The effect that an untrained singer has is his or her ability to continually remind

the spectator of his or her humanity, for it is human to err. Paul Connerton uses a

brilliant example of muscle memory when asking the reader to recount the first time he

or she had learned to swim. He details that our first strokes and kicks are interrupted by

unnecessary movements, but when we have become used to swimming our movements

flow together. [71]   The untrained voice, just like the untrained swimmer, will constantly

interrupt itself and will serve as a reminder of the act of singing. The exerted effort of

the untrained voice will continually interrupt the flow of the voice and will nullify any

sense of the song being effortless.   As McNeff so rightly puts it in his article on *The

Threepenny Opera:*

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[70] McNeff, S. "The Threepenny Opera" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G,
87.
[71] Connerton, P. *How Societies Remember,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 101.

While it is a mistake to cast the work with opera singers, it is equally wrong to

employ actors who do not have strong musical talents, and, just as importantly,

the ability to strike the right kind of balance between an 'epic' and a more

mellifluous delivery – something that requires an instinctive musical

intelligence.[72]

This then returns us to the struggle of text against lyrics and how this not only affected

Brecht and Weill, but also presents itself as a problem to the modern director and

researcher. While the music in *The Threepenny Opera* was intended for the un-trained

voice, it is at times written for the opera singer and employs various operatic techniques.

Anyone taking on the task of producing *The Threepenny Opera,* including both Brecht

and Weill during the creation of the play, would constantly be at odds with this battle.

The untrained voice plays well into Brecht's Epic Theatre theories as it helps to

reinforce the separation of the songs from the script, as the untrained voice will

continuously remind the listener of the act of singing. But the use of untrained voices

did have a negative impact on the music to *The Threepenny Opera* as it necessitated

some cuts in the music, as with the example of "Lucy's Aria".

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[72] McNeff, S. "The Threepenny Opera" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G,
86.

Despite its name *The Threepenny Opera* is not a proper opera. Simply put, an opera is a piece of staged work that is entirely sung throughout the piece. [73] Additionally, operas before Brecht's time traditionally employed classical music. [74] Since *The Threepenny Opera* has both spoken dialogue as well as jazz influenced music and non-classically trained singers, it can either be considered an operetta (little opera) or a musical – but not an opera. [75] Despite its name, *The Beggar's Opera* was not an opera either, but an operetta. This was due to the fact that a large majority of the music was arranged from already existing popular music and it used spoken dialogue. [76] However, Brecht and Weill did borrow operatic techniques in the form of structuring as seen with the use of overtures and finales.

The overture is the first use of an operatic technique that the spectator is exposed to in *The Threepenny Opera*. It functions as a traditional overture in the sense of placement. By opening the piece with an overture it informs the audience that music plays a significant role in the play. Like the overture, all three of the finales contribute to maintaining the traditional opera format. Typically finales fall at the end of each act and serve as a summing up of the act as well as a mechanism to propel the action into

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[73] There are some exceptions to this definition; for example Bizet's *Carmen* originally had spoken dialogue along with the music, but the dialogue was quickly turned to recitative because the opera audiences were not used to spoken dialogue.

[74] Eisler's mentor Schoenberg was one of the first to introduce New Music into the operatic stage, but before that time opera had been limited to the classical genre.

[75] The specific classification would then depend upon the company that was producing on the production. For example if an opera company was performing the production, it would then be considered an operetta.

[76] McNeff, S. "The Threepenny Opera" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 81-82.

the next act. It is quite common for finales to be full of life and involve numerous

characters. The grand finale (the finale situated in the final act) typically involves the

entire ensemble.

The finales in *The Threepenny Opera* serve a similar function as in traditional

opera, but of course take their own Brechtian turns. The finale of act one initially

appears to function as a finale in traditional opera because it is comprised of three major

characters (Mr. Peachum, Mrs. Peachum, and Polly) and allows them to discuss their

differences and aim to work out a solution to their problem. The song quickly turns into

a social comment once Mr. Peachum suggests that "the world is poor, and man's a shit".

[77] Suddenly what began as a harmless finale is turned into a political comment on

society. With this gradual introduction of social commentary into the first finale, Brecht

is able to play to his audience without offending them out-right. Secondly, the finale of

act two follows the proper placement of a finale but it does not follow the common role.

The finale of act two involves Macheath and Mrs. Peachum (or Jenny if one is reading

from the Willett and Manheim translation). The general sentiment of the song pertains

to the idea that mankind only survives by destroying the weakest and poorest of its

inhabitants and that one cannot have morals without riches. This song however does not

sum up the previous actions nor does it propel the piece into the next act. At most the

only purpose this number would serve in a traditional opera is to allow time for a

change of scenery. But as I mentioned before, Brecht used this song to ensure a

separation of the elements and to prevent the play from being too culinary.

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[77] Brecht, B. "The Threepenny Opera" *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 34.

The finale of act three, however, serves its operatic purpose thoroughly. It is sung by the entire company and provides an ending and resolution to the entirety of the play. Musically it delivers all the aspects of a traditional finale. It allows each of the main characters to sing a line or two about their response to the conclusions of the plot as well as a full company unison ending with a satisfactory long and loud final note. As Weill writes in a correspondence to *Anbruch* in 1929:

> Thus the last 'Dreigroschenfinale' is in no way a parody. Rather, the idea of opera was directly exploited as a means of resolving a conflict and thus shaping the action. Consequently it had to be presented in its purest, most pristine form. [78]

The *Deus ex Machina* ending in the finale of act three is a prime operatic device employed by Brecht and Weill to resolve an otherwise dismal and tricky ending. The *Deus ex Machina* ending is important in this piece because the unrealistic nature is further enforced when Mrs. Peachum sings "So it all turned out nicely in the end. How nice and easy everything would be if you could always reckon with saviours on horseback". [79] The character of Mrs. Peachum therefore acknowledges the use of a *Deus ex Machina* within the scene in which the *Deus ex Machina* is taking place. This moment of meta-theatre encourages the spectator take awareness of the function of this technique in the operatic genre and to question its effectiveness.

So, in order to highlight the aspects of the operatic genre that they found fault with, Brecht and Weill employed various techniques in order to bring forth and raise

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[78] Weill, K. "Correspondence Concerning 'Threepenny Opera'" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera*, ed Hinton, S, 125.
[79] Brecht, B. "The Threepenny Opera" *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 55.

question to their placement and continuous use within the operatic genre. Some examples of these are the use of operatic structuring with the overture and finales and the *Deus ex Machina* ending. In almost all of these cases Brecht and Weill not only employed the operatic technique, but also alienated it slightly in order to draw attention to it. By making the familiar strange, Brecht and Weill aimed to call attention to techniques that they felt weakened the operatic play.

Changes/Omissions

Throughout the construction, run, and revival of the show, *The Threepenny Opera* was subjected to various changes to the music. In some cases it was due to the use of untrained voices, as with Lucy's aria, but the majority of the changes in the music were due to the fact that Brecht and Weill were constantly revising the piece. Also a large part of the errors came from the fact that the original music was entirely handwritten because Weill was so rushed to write the music that he was not able to complete it in time for the printing to be secured. [80] Because of the contract Weill signed in April of 1924 with Universal Edition, he had almost no rights to his music. [81] This means Weill's surviving music does not give the modern researcher proper insight as to what the music had originally sounded like since Weill had almost no say over the final printing and distribution of his music. So, when looking into the music of *The*

[80]Abbott, G. "The 'Dreigroschen' sound" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 162.
[81] Fuegi, J. "Most Umpleasant Things with *The Threepenny Opera*: Weill, Brecht, and Money" *Kurt Weill: A New Orpheus,* ed Kowalke, K. (New Haven: Yale University, 1986) 162.

Threepenny Opera one must be aware that the problem of ownership and original content will be recurrent.

Some examples of errors in the Universal Edition of the score include the fact that the music was orchestrated for a company of ten players playing twenty instruments, but the original orchestra consisted of only seven players. There are other mistakes printed throughout the Overture, some of them including the fact that passages for the soprano sax are written too high for the instrument and that there is not enough time allotted for the musicians to change between their various instruments. [82]

Another omission from the Universal Edition of the score was the note for the orchestra to play the "The Ballad of Mac the Knife" theme during each of Macheath's entrances. Each theme was to be played slightly differently depending on the attitude of the scene. For example, Weill indicated that in scene two while Macheath is preparing for his wedding in a stable with stolen furniture that the motif should be played "very soft, like a motive". In scene six it is to be played "softly as a waltz" right after Macheath has been jailed for the first time and sits in a prison. And scene nine's motif is instructed to be played "as a funeral march" while Macheath is in his jail cell for the second time. [83] These musical themes create informative contexts to the scenes, especially between the two prison scenes. In the first prison scene a soft waltz could indicate Macheath's levity despite the situation whereas a funeral march in the second prison scene would refer to Macheath's own awareness of his mortality. If included in

[82] Abbott, G. "The 'Dreigroschen' sound" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 162-163.
[83] Abbott, G. "The 'Dreigroschen' sound" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 168.

any production of *The Threepenny Opera* these motifs would serve several functions. The repetition of the motif would serve as a reminder to the listener of "The Ballad of Mac the Knife", which provides an underscore of Macheath's murderous past. Also, with the changes in tempo and intent the motifs could aid in setting a *gestus* to each scene. These motifs would indicate the situation before the scene arrived at it, which is similar to role of the projections and signs. Therefore, prior to the scene unfolding, the spectator would sample the general attitude of the scene before it happened. For example, the motif that is instructed to be played "as a funeral march" is placed before the scene when Macheath is sentenced to death. This motif then not only sets the attitude of the following scene, but acts as a foreshadowing of upcoming events, thus diminishing any suspense. This plays directly into Brecht's Epic Theatre theories as he asserted that by employing such techniques to dispel the suspense, this would assist in avoiding a catharsis that would purge the spectator of his or her thoughts and emotions.

It is highly apparent that there are many mistakes in the Universal Edition of the score, and this therefore creates material that can be unreliable for research. But luckily some of these corrections are still surviving in the form of notes or correspondences between the creators and various other organizations. Through highlighting the errors I aim not only to inform the reader of the difficult task of dissecting the music at face value, but also bring to light the possible corrections alluded to, and how these would play into Brecht's theories on Epic Theatre. These errors in conjunction with Brecht's "*Threepenny Opera* Notes", written well after the premiere and success of the play, suggest that his theories behind Epic Music were not finalized at this point. *The*

Threepenny Opera underwent many revisions during its run as well as after its success. This shows that the conception and formulation of *The Threepenny Opera* was not a static process but endured significant development. This would lead me to suspect that Brecht's Epic theories were not static at this time either, but developed over the span of the revisions to *The Threepenny Opera.*

In conclusion, the music in *The Threepenny Opera,* in most cases, ties directly into Brecht's theories on Epic Theatre. This can be seen in his aim to separate the songs from the text by employing such techniques as the "song lighting". Along with this separation of song from script he also encouraged the actor to remain separate from his or her character. For this he engaged with the idea of *gestus* in order to create a fixed attitude for a character and also used the "Street Scene" model to create what he viewed as an ideal theatrical situation. Brecht and Weill were engaged in a constant struggle between the prominence of music over words, and thus Brecht developed concepts to enhance the lyrics by pushing against the music. This occurred in the form of words being spoken or sung against the melody and the context of the song providing a contrast to the style of the music. The use of untrained singers in *The Threepenny Opera* ties directly into Brecht's theories as the untrained voice serves as a reminder of the physical act of singing since an untrained singer will exert more effort than a trained singer. And finally, the use of operatic techniques in *The Threepenny Opera* provides a coupling between the operatic genre and the play itself. *The Threepenny Opera* does not function as a mockery of *The Beggar's Opera*, but uses already existing conventions of the opera genre to highlight the faults that Brecht and Weill found with it.

However, there are several places in *The Threepenny Opera* in which I located discrepancies in Brecht's theories of Epic Theatre. Brecht maintained that Epic Theatre should engage with a separation of the elements; however the songs "The Insufficiency of Human Endeavour" and the "Wedding Song" rise organically from the text surrounding it and cannot be separated from this scene. Also the "Call from the Grave" and the "Barbara Song" function in a Dramatic fashion by joining the colour of the music with the emotions of the characters. The *molto agitat* of the "Call from the Grave" mirrors the agitation behind the mortality of Macheath and the solo piano of the "Barbara Song" coincides with Polly's isolation as she stands alone in front of her parents to confess. Another song which harkens closer to Dramatic Music than Epic is the "Jealousy Duet".   In this song the animosity of the two wives is doubled in the dissonant harmonies of the chorus and the bickering is reflected in the quick back and forth responses of this number. These are just some of the examples I have uncovered during my research of *The Threepenny Opera's* music taking on a Dramatic flavour. As indicated in the previous chapter, Brecht acknowledged the fact that any Epic play may take on Dramatic aspects when needed. However, it seems that Brecht was still developing his Epic theories during the derision of this play and so it is likely that these discrepancies arose from that as well. This is a concept I will discuss in the conclusion of this thesis after I have analysed my two other case studies.

In addition to these discrepancies there is also the query behind the unexpected and unplanned success of this anti-capitalist play within a capitalist market. Research into this success is known as the "misunderstanding thesis" by scholars and was fronted

by the theorists T.W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch. [84]   This thesis is founded on the question

of how such a progressive and rebellious piece of theatre not only entered into popular

culture but also how it achieved such wide-spread success. The focus of the

"misunderstanding thesis" rests on the idea that the audience misunderstood the

intentions behind the operetta, contributing to its acceptance. I will return to this

concept later in my conclusion as well, where I will explore the over-all impact this

success had on Brecht's theories. From this I will determine the validity of Brecht's

Epic Theatre theories within his musical formatting to see what role Epic Music plays.

But before I embark on this I would like to further engage with Brecht and Weill's

musical relationship and unpick their full length opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of*

Mahagonny.

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[84] The two articles regarding the "Misunderstanding Theory" by T.W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch can be found in Stephen Hinton's *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990).

Synopsis:

The play opens with an overture, once this has commenced we are introduced to the characters Fatty, Moses and Begbick who stumble upon empty land which Begbick declares as the city of Mahagonny. Upon this declaration many new characters are drawn to the city, the first are a group of women headed by Jenny as well as a group of friends - Jim, Jake, Bill and Joe. Jim and Jenny meet one another and are immediately attracted. Greed begins to take a turn for the worse and the crime rate and currency fluctuation begin to wreck havoc on Mahagonny and its residents start to flee. Another complication threatens Mahagonny with the onset of a hurricane. The hurricane miraculously misses the city and all of its inhabitants rejoice. A year later Mahagonny is booming with people engaged in eating, sex, fighting and drinking. The only crime in Mahagonny is not being able to pay your bills, and unfortunately Jim has run out of money and finds himself in jail. Jim faces trial and is sentenced to death in the electric chair. The play draws to a close amid confusion and protesting as the city of Mahagonny is consumed by flames and the inhabitants split into groups, some protesting for and some against the glory of Mahagonny.

Song Listing:

Act 1   Nr. 1: Overture, founding of Mahagonny (Begbick, Fatty & Moses) Bar 11

Nr. 2: "Alabama Song" (Jenny & Female Chorus) Bar 24

Nr. 3: News of followers flocking to the city of Mahagonny

Nr. 4: "Off to Mahagonny" (Jim, Jake, Bill & Joe) Bar 44

Nr. 5: The arrival of Jim to Mahagonny

Nr. 6: Jim and Jenny meet

Nr. 7: News of followers leaving Mahagonny

Nr. 8: Jim tries to leave Mahagonny

Nr. 9: Interlude (Piano) Bar 114, "Deep in the Woods" (Jim) Bar 116

Nr. 10: Typhoon scene "No, Not Utter Destruction" (Jenny, Begbick, Fatty, Moses &

Chorus) Bar 134

Nr. 11: "Alabama Song" (Reprise) (Jenny) Bar 151

Act 2   Nr. 12: Followers rejoice salvation of Mahagonny

Nr. 13: Act 2: First consumption scene "One Means to Eat" (Male Chorus) Bar 8

Nr. 14: Second consumption scene "The Lovers", "One Means to Eat" (Male

Chorus) Bar 40

Nr. 15: Third consumption scene "Fighting", "One Means to Eat" (Male Chorus) Bar

76

Nr. 16: Fourth consumption scene "Drinking" Bar 77

Act 3 Nr. 17: Jim is behind bars

Nr. 18: "Five Buck a Day" (Moses) Bar 1 "Benares-Song" (Jenny, Begbick, Fatty,

Bill, Moses, Tobby, Chorus) Bar 58

Nr. 19: "Darling Jenny" (Jim & Jenny) Bar 67, "One Means to Eat" (Male Chorus)

Bar 73

Nr. 20: Finale, "God in Mahagonny" (Fatty, Tobby, Bill & Jenny) Bar 78, "Poem of a

Dead Man" (Fatty, Moses, Begbick, Tobby, Bill, Jenny & Chorus)Bar 92 "Alabama

Song (Reprise)" Bar 96

The opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (shortened simply to

Mahagonny for the purposes of this paper) opened in March 1930 at the Leipzig Opera

House. It was developed from *Little Mahagonny*, Brecht and Weill's first collaboration,

which premiered at the Baden-Baden festival in July 1927. *Little Mahagonny*

originated from a series of Brecht's poems that had been published in the early 1920s in

a cycle called "Devotions for the Home" (*Hauspostille*). *Little Mahagonny* was

comprised of the "Alabama Song", "Off to Mahagonny", "Five Bucks a Day",

"Benares-Song", "God in Mahagonny" and the "Poem of a Dead Man" as well as

transition music. [85] These songs were then worked into the full length *Mahagonny*

opera. The music in *Mahagonny* is continuous and structured in twenty numbered

sections or scenes. Since there is no clear delineation within each number between the

various arias, recitatives or choruses, I have compiled the above song outline for ease of

navigating and interpreting the music. [86] For the purposes of clarity and brevity I have

only chosen to list the sections of each number that I will be referring directly to.

Along with the use of the Willett and Manheim translation of the text, I will be

referencing the Universal Edition of the *Mahagonny* vocal score which was completed

in November 1929. The resounding complication with the use of the 1929 vocal score

is that it was published before the first premiere and subsequent productions of

Mahagonny in which several revisions were made. Also the Universal Edition

publishers encouraged Brecht and Weill to edit some of the more controversial sections

of the score (namely the sexual content) and the final revised copy of the vocal score of

1931 was eventually confiscated and more than likely destroyed. [87] In addition, I will

use Brecht's notes to *Mahagonny* which I have introduced in my chapter on Epic

Theatre. The Notes to *Mahagonny* were written in 1930 with Peter Suhrkamp, Brecht's

collaborator on *Versuche,* and were published shortly after the publication of the opera

[85] Aaron, J. "On Directing *Mahagonny*" *Themes in Drama: An Annual Publication,* No. 3. ed Redmond, J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 2-6.

[86] I have derived the music outline from the English translation of Willett and Manheim's text of *Mahagonny* in *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 3,* (London: Methuen, 1979).

[87] Drew, D. "Preface to 1969 Edition" *Aufstieg Und Fall Der Stadt Mahagonny*, Vocal Score by Kurt Weill (U.S.A: Universal Edition, 1969) 1.

Mahagonny. These notes were published under the title "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre", but since this was not published in conjunction with Weill, and in some cases against Weill's views on music, it cannot be taken to refer directly to the 1929 to 1930 performances of *Mahagonny*, at least not in reference to the music. Weill devised a series of his own notes to *Mahagonny* as well, but once again since this was not prepared with Brecht one is purely subjected to Weill's views on the music.

Various components of the opera *Mahagonny* work in conjunction with Brecht's theories to create a piece of opera that mirrors Brecht's Epic Theatre. The components are comprised of the concept of an anti-culinary opera, the use of English lyrics in a German play, the operatic techniques employed as well as the use of continuous music, all of which I will further elaborate on in the remainder of this chapter. I will draw attention to the struggle between Brecht and Weill and their inability to form a harmonious relationship between their emerging ideologies and theories and how this affected the final construction of the opera.

Culinary Opera

Brecht defined culinary opera as a form of theatre which achieved a seamless combination of all its elements. He related it to that of a chef who prepared a meal in such a way that all of the elements of the feast combined together and created a dish that was easily digestible. This dish was prepared to such an extent that you could swallow

it whole and have no thought for chewing. Brecht referred to culinary theatre as a negative term, so when he termed *Mahagonny* a culinary opera in his notes of 1930 one could argue that he was dissatisfied with the final product of the opera. But in his notes he asserts:

> Perhaps *Mahagonny* is as culinary as ever - just as culinary as an opera ought to be - but one of its functions is to change society; it brings the culinary principle under discussion, it attacks the society that needs operas of such a sort; it still perches happily on the old bough, perhaps, but at least it has started (out of absent-mindedness or bad conscience) to saw it through ... And here you have the effect of the innovations and the song they sing.
>
> Real innovations attack the roots. [88]

This quote highlights Brecht's admission of *Mahagonny* being culinary but also acknowledges the need for it to be culinary so that it could appeal to the very people it was attacking. *Mahagonny* celebrates the excessive, and there is nothing more excessive than opera. Opera was first conceived as a revival of the classic Greek plays with the Greek chorus as a singing chorus for the courts. This revived art form became popular outside of the court as well, but because of the subject matter, cost of production, tradition and etiquette it primarily retained an audience filled with wealthy consumers. Brecht viewed that the operatic genre was created for the bourgeoisie (both in content and in price) and felt that only those who were truly successful capitalists could earn a spot in the upper classes. *Mahagonny* takes capitalism to the extreme; the only crime in *Mahagonny* is not having enough money. So *Mahagonny* serves a double

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[88] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* ed Willett, J. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 41.

purpose; as a moral reminder that capitalism in its extreme can lead to death and also that the operatic format is one that needs to be questioned due to its excessiveness.

Another reason that *Mahagonny* needed to be culinary was because of the content of the opera itself. As Brecht writes in a separate essay on music and Epic Theatre:

> I feel I should point out that in my view Weill's music for this opera is not purely gestic; but many parts of it are, enough anyway for it to represent a serious threat to the common type of opera, which in its current manifestations we call the purely culinary opera. The theme of the opera *Mahagonny* is the cooking process itself. [89]

Mahagonny not only serves as a means to underscore the excessiveness of opera and the upper classes, but is culinary in format as well as subject. The culinary aspect of *Mahagonny* doubles the culinary aspect of the subject matter. This concept is especially apparent in Nr. 13 in which the character Jake eats himself to death. This relates to the idea of extreme capitalism being deadly which is then mirrored in the excessiveness of this scene. If one can eat themselves to death with food, what would happen when one consumes an excessive amount of the culinary opera? Brecht asserts that, in a way, the operatic format was dying out, and he developed his theories in order to revive the structure of opera. So in other words, just as Jake gorged himself to death, the antiquated and culinary form of opera was bringing about its own death, at least in the sense of creating innovations within the art form.

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[89] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 87.

Additionally, the use of a large scale orchestra plays into the concept of the culinary. Brecht frequently criticized large orchestras for washing out the text and demanded that the size of the orchestra should be down sized for his productions. However Weill did not necessarily agree with him on this point and this is something I will explore later in this chapter. [90] Regardless of size, Mahagonny needed an orchestra in order for it to be accessible to the bourgeois opera-going audience it was playing to. Traditional opera always involved a sizeable orchestra and that is exactly what was replicated in *Mahagonny.* Although such culinary and extravagant techniques were employed, like a large orchestra and continuous music, the content of the opera is able to turn these culinary aspects on top of themselves. The content of *Mahagonny* pushes excess to the extreme, which highlights the very hypocrisy of the use of excessive elements of theatre, which in turn questions the entire operatic genre. So *Mahagonny* needed an orchestra in order to comment on the culinary by, in a sense, being culinary.

But even though Brecht held a strong abhorrence of the culinary, it is apparent that he still found virtue in the use of the culinary for social change. Jules Aaron makes a wonderful allusion between Brecht and the concept of culinary with his speculations on Brecht's collaborative nature:

> All of Brecht's plays to some extent were conscious collaborations. Friends and professional researchers surrounded him continually, and Brecht, like a cook himself, culled what he needed from the artistic stew. [91]

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[90] This can be seen with both *Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny.*
[91] Aaron, J. "On Directing *Mahagonny*" *Themes in Drama: An Annual Publication*, 2.

The humour in this quote arises from Brecht's extreme distaste for the culinary even though, as Aaron highlights, Brecht is a bit of a chef himself.   Perhaps then, Brecht was appealing for a new concept of culinary. With opera, the culinary can only be found in the easily digestible final product. Brecht's opera uses culinary in an entirely different way. Instead of a culinary ending, Brecht used the culinary for devising. Whereas many opera productions operated with a separation between production staff, Brecht maintained that the separation should be found between the elements of the theatre. Brecht's attack, therefore, should not be seen as against the culinary, but in how the culinary was used.   It is observable that even though *Mahagonny* has culinary aspects to its structure, these aspects of the culinary were necessary in order for *Mahagonny* to reach the audience that it was debasing, to mirror the operatic format it was critiquing and to double the subject with which it was indulging.

English Lyrics

In Brecht's plays prior to *Mahagonny*, he used the music as a means to break up the flow of the play and to dispel any emotional tension. Since *Mahagonny* employs continuous music, Brecht used English lyrics in a German text as a means to create a disturbance to the plot. The use of English lyrics in an opera was extremely unusual during Brecht's time. English lyrics were rarely used in opera at all, with the exception of operas written in English for an English audience, and even this was rare. Also, English was not a well known language among Brecht's German audience, a fact

assuredly apparent in Brecht's own ignorance of the language. [92]   One must not only

explore why Brecht used English lyrics, but why he used them to such a large extent.

The first set of English lyrics appears at Nr. 2 as the "Alabama Song" and takes

up the entirety of scene two. The "Alabama Song" is performed by Jenny and the

female chorus. The women lament farewell to the Alabama moon and their desire for

whiskey, boys, and money. The "Alabama Song" appears again as a reprise in Nr. 11

before the end of act one after the town is alerted of a hurricane that is about to destroy

the city.   The song makes its final appearance in the finale of the opera after the

execution of Jim and the destruction of the city of Mahagonny.   The next set of English

lyrics appears in Nr. 18 as the "Benares-Song".   The "Benares-Song" appears at the

moment Jim is sentenced to death for being unable to pay his bills, and the company

laments as they are unsure of where to go. The characters Jenny, Begbick, Fatty, Toby,

Bill and Moses sing to the town of Benares, which was destroyed in an earthquake,

asking where they should go next. Both of these songs encompass the theme of

movement. The "Alabama Song" is associated with the point at which the initial set of

tourists arrive at Mahagonny and then when the inhabitants are faced with the prospect

of leaving their town. The "Benares-Song" and "Alabama Song" reprises are placed at

the moments when the founders are finally forced to leave Mahagonny. This change in

direction is doubled by the purpose of the English lyrics, as they serve as a diversion for

the continuous music in the opera. In Brecht's Epic Theatre theories he details that

music should be used as a means to interrupt the flow of the plot in order to create a

distance from the spectator and the build of the story. Since *Mahagonny* is constructed

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[92] Elisabeth Hauptmann wrote and translated the majority of the English text for Brecht's plays before 1933.

with continuous music, Brecht was unable to use the music itself as a means of interruption, so he used the language within the songs instead. Since these are the only English lyrics in the text, they call attention to the points in the plot at which they are placed. These points happen to be at the three dynamic aspects of movement, plotting the rise and then the fall of the city of Mahagonny.

It is important to note that although the original piano score uses English names for the characters; this was a mistake, thus allowing the use of English lyrics to operate as a means of being unfamiliar. Although still quite untraditional, it would not have been as strange or unusual if the Americanized characters were given English lyrics to sing in. Brecht and Weill strove to create a world with *Mahagonny* that was universal, and did not want the opera to be fixed in the Americanized setting indicated by the two English songs and the American names. This sentiment however was not materialized in time for the first print edition of the piano score which is why the American names are retained in the German printing, instead of the German names which were ultimately used for the German productions. [93] Since Brecht and Weill encouraged the use of German names in their original production, this allowed the use of the English lyrics to serve their function of making the familiar unfamiliar. By having the German speaking and German named characters sing in English, it created a detachment from the viewer's ears between the text and the music, thus highlighting these moments in the opera. So through the use of the English text Brecht endeavoured to interrupt the flow of the continuous music and at the same means prompt the alienation effect by framing the English lyrics as strange, and thus something to be contemplated. By placing these

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[93] Willett, J. & Manheim, R. "Introduction", *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 3,* xii.

songs, relating to movement, at pivotal moments in the opera Brecht aimed to highlight these instances in the plot.

Operatic Techniques, Musical Influences and Continuous Music

Unlike *The Threepenny Opera*, *Mahagonny* is a proper opera. By proper opera I am referring to its use of continuous music and the complexity of the musical and vocal composition; which is affirmed by the fact that opera companies perform *Mahagonny* to this date. In addition, *Little Mahagonny* was comprised only of opera singers (with the exception of Weill's wife, Lotte Lenya, who was a last moment substitution). [94] The role of operatic techniques in *Mahagonny* is similar to the purpose they had in *The Threepenny Opera*. They were not employed simply as an intention to make a mockery of opera, but to draw attention to the operatic format. As Brecht addresses in his 1930 notes to *Mahagonny*:

> 'Mahagonny' is a piece of fun. The opera 'Mahagonny' pays conscious tribute to the idiocy of the operatic form. The idiocy of opera lies in the fact that the rational elements are employed, solid reality is aimed at, but at the same time it is all washed out by the music. [95]

When referring to the idiocy of the operatic form, Brecht is alluding to the idea of naturalism being aimed at in tandem with the use of continuous music. Continuous music is not natural; therefore Brecht argued that as long as the operatic form employed

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[94] Kowalke, K. "Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice" *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 5:1 (March, 1993) 73.
[95] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 35.

the use of continuous music while aspiring towards naturalism, there would

continuously be hypocrisy within the form. One would always cancel out the other, and

therefore Brecht deemed this as a flawed format, and sought to use the opera

Mahagonny to draw attention to this matter. Brecht and Weill attempted to achieve this

by creating an opera that adhered to traditional operatic conventions while containing a

subject matter that highlighted the excessiveness of the operatic content. In order to

maintain that the opera did not become too culinary, Brecht and Weill broke up the flow

of the continuous music and acknowledged that the opera *Mahagonny* was not to be

taken as realistic.

Both Brecht and Weill used various musical and operatic techniques in order to

disrupt the continuous music and draw attention to critical moments in the text so that

the text would not be washed away in the music. As Willett denotes:

> The real innovation, never followed up by Brecht, lay in the alternation of
>
> rhythmical and free dialogue, sometimes over the orchestra, sometimes
>
> unaccompanied, and in the ingenious combination of solos and chorus. [96]

Since the music is continuous, the only means of breaking up the flow other than

through language, is through the text and the rhythm. An example of this can be seen

with the orchestration of the musical numbers. The full orchestra was employed with

very simple melodies such as the "Alabama Song".   However, when the

accompaniment was more complex the melodic line was eliminated and the song was

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[96] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects,* (London: Methuen, 1977) 132.

joined only by spoken dialogue. [97]   This denies the joining of complex music with complex vocals, thus straying away from the complete indulgence of the format commonly used in opera. This works against the culinary aspect of the opera *Mahagonny*. Indulgence is the primary ingredient in culinary opera, and for this to be resisted in *Mahagonny* shows that Brecht and Weill were striving for the opera to be anti-culinary.

Additionally, Weill suggested in his notes for his unpublished prompt-book on *Mahagonny* that the orchestra should be flush with the stage, so that some of the scenes could be played within the orchestra. [98] If the orchestra were in sight of the audience, this would force the spectator to view the orchestra at all times and keep a constant awareness of the physical act of musical production. The idea of performing the scenes in the orchestra pit allowed for a blurring of the lines between the action of the characters and the physical production of the music. Also the use of a second stage-band falls in conjunction with this technique. At Nr. 9 before and during Jim's "Deep in the Woods" aria, there is a piano sitting on stage generating the majority of the accompaniment. [99] As the stage directions in the Willett and Manheim translation indicate, the characters "are listening to a piano". This in turn is exactly what Jim and his friends, the actors playing Jim and his friends and the spectators are doing. There is

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[97] Amidon, K. "'Oh Show Us...': Opera and/as Spectatorship in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny" Mahagonny.com: The Brecht Yearbook 29*, eds Silberman, M. & Vassen, F. The International Brecht Society (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004) 227.

[98] Weill, K. "Introduction to the Prompt-Book of the Opera *Mahagonny" Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 3,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 94.

[99] Amidon, K. "'Oh Show Us...'" *Mahagonny.com: The Brecht Yearbook 29*, eds Silberman, M. & Vassen, F, 228.

no falsity in this action; music is applied in such a way that is actively truthful, which is a challenge in the deceptive and feigned sphere of theatre.

Another example of an anti-culinary technique can be seen at the opening of the opera at Nr. 1 as detailed by Kevin Amidon in the *Brecht Yearbook*:

> ...in fact the relationship between music and diegetic sound, in a reversal atypical for opera, is first established by the absence of the vocal element. The first sound heard by the audience after the conclusion of the overture is not the voice of a character, either spoken or sung, but rather the engine noise of the fugitives' truck, which, backfiring and stalling, rolls after some ten measures of accompanying music to a final dead stop. [100]

In a traditional opera, the overture is immediately followed by singing. This opening number would introduce the characters in the opera as well as establish the plot. For *Mahagonny* to initiate with an absence of vocalization replaced with the noise of an engine informs the spectator that *Mahagonny* does not adhere to the rules of traditional opera despite its use of an overture. Additionally, the characters do not begin singing immediately once they enter the stage, but engage in dialogue with one another. This once again stalls the introduction of the singing voice making the first human vocalization dialogue over music. To further emphasize this unconventional opening, the orchestra pauses as the dialogue starts, creating a moment of silence before the spoken dialogue. It is not until Begbick declares the founding of Mahagonny that the singing begins, drawing a correlation between the operatic voice and the city of

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[100] Amidon, K. "'Oh Show Us...'" *Mahagonny.com: The Brecht Yearbook 29*, eds Silberman, M. & Vassen, F, 230.

Mahagonny. As established earlier, Brecht and Weill viewed the musical element of opera as what constituted it as un-realistic. It may be intentional that the singing does not commence until the city of Mahagonny has been founded, thus establishing that the city is just as un-realistic and imaginary as the continuous singing.

Another operatic technique used in the opera *Mahagonny* is the use of musical dynamics in the large chorus numbers. In opera, it is quite common for various voices to sing in unison, but each with different words or melodies. This results in various texts getting lost in the clutter of harmonizing music and rhythms. To prevent this, emphasis must be given to the predominant text. This can be seen in the example of The Typhoon scene at Nr. 10 which involves a verbal battle between the male chorus and the other characters. [101] Led by Jim, the main characters must out-sing the male chorus in order for their text to be understood. To counter this, the male chorus sing softly, but repeat their lyrics over and over so that the spectating listener will be able to understand the lyrics during one of the many repetitions. Another example of this can be seen at Nr. 18 with Moses' speech during the trial. Weill writes that Moses' speech is to be sung as if it were a universally familiar song, which is so tedious that no one pays attention to it, and the spectators are therefore directed to the interactions of bribery. [102] This emphasizes the idea that bribery provides more entertainment than following the law, and thus highlights human nature indulging in the sinful. The above

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[101] Chisholm, D. "Brecht and Weill's Views of *Mahagonny*: Musical-Textual Tensions" *Mahagonny.com: The Brecht Yearbook 29*, eds Silberman, M. & Vassen, F, 188.
[102] Weill, K. "Suggestions for the Stage Realization of the Opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*" *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 3,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 97.

uses of musical dynamics allows for the significant text to become prominent while various voices are singing concurrently.

A further technique employed for the means of disjointing the continuous music is the technique of framing a section with the use of reprises. This can be seen with the four consecutive scenes that highlight consumption and employ the musical techniques of repetition and on-stage musical production. The first of the consumption scenes begin at Nr. 13 with the chorus singing "One means to Eat" in which Jake eats himself to death. The second consumption scene at Nr. 14 shows the excessive purchasing of whores and concludes with a reprise of the chorus' "One means to Eat". The third consumption scene at Nr. 15 details the excessiveness of violence with Joe beaten to death in the fighting ring, and once again this scene ends with the chorus singing "One means to Eat". The final consumption scene at Nr. 16 portrays the imbibing of alcohol, but leads to the discovery of Jim's inability to pay his bills – the ultimate and only sin in the city of Mahagonny. This scene, however, originally ended with a final reprise of the "One means to Eat" song, but it was cut in the final revision. As David Drew theorizes,

> this was due to the monotony of the length and repetition at this pivotal moment
> in the text, and also the feeble ending this song would have provided for the end
> of Act two. [103]

The "One means to Eat" song then serves a dual function, that of repetition as means of highlighting and framing those three scenes, but also as forewarning of the plot to come, so that the spectator does not become emotionally involved in the deaths or tragedies of

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[103] Drew, D. "Preface to 1969 Edition" *Aufstieg Und Fall Der Stadt Mahagonny*, Vocal Score by Kurt Weill, 2.

these scenes. The short seventeen measure song lists the four sins of gluttony, sex, violence and alcohol ending with the idea that these are all encouraged as long as one can continue to indulge. Since this song is presented before each situation plays out, as well as repeated at the end of each scene, the audience is aware of the plot before it happens, thus eliminating any suspense. The inclusion of the "One means to Eat" song within each scene associates each scene to the other. This creates a montage effect by juxtaposing individual scenes against one another while allowing the four scenes to operate as a combined unit because of the shared repetition of the "One means to Eat" song. The three scenes are clearly framed by the placement of the song both at the beginning of the cycle, as well as the end of each scene. The song "One means to Eat" appears once more in Nr. 19 after "Darling Jenny" and right before Jim is about to die. The placement of this song highlights a correlation between the death and destruction of each of Jim's friends with his own. The song, "One means to Eat", serves as a forewarning to the listening spectator of upcoming danger. Therefore the song "One means to Eat" does not only function as a foreshadowing of destruction in the consumption scenes, but also for the ultimate deadly finale. This once again removes any suspense from the plot, allowing the spectator to sit back and judge the actions of Jim without the emotional impact of execution.

Even with Brecht and Weill's techniques for disruption, *Mahagonny* is still reliant on its continuous music. Music is one of the primary aspects which allows *Mahagonny* to be culinary, and as I have already touched on, *Mahagonny* need to be culinary in order to address the audience it was commenting on. It would have been significantly

more difficult for Brecht to present *Mahagonny* as an opera if it did not have continuous

music, as this is one defining aspect of traditional opera. Many of Brecht's techniques

for *Mahagonny* were quite unconventional, so in order for the opera to be accepted by

the traditional opera audience, it needed to have some foundation in the roots of

traditional opera, otherwise it would have been rejected as an opera all together. Brecht

and Weill pushed the boundaries of tradition with *Mahagonny*. They played with the

concept of the operatic voice with the use of untrained singers such as Lenya. They

combined spoken dialogue with the recitative and arias. They incorporated the use of

non-traditional language with the use of English lyrics. In addition, Brecht used many of

his Epic Theatre theories such as a separation of the elements, *gestus*, montage,

projections and a revealing of the back-stage mechanics, which were extremely

innovative at the time. With all of the non-traditional aspects it was essential for Brecht

to anchor *Mahagonny* in some sense of the culinary for it to be recognizable as an

opera; this is where the continuous music comes into play. It was highly unusual for an

opera to incorporate spoken dialogue, especially an opera that was not overtly a

comedy.

So even though continuous music is a culinary component and *Mahagonny* is an

anti-culinary opera, the continuous music was essential to qualify it as an opera in the

eyes (or ears) of the traditional opera audience. Through the use of dialogue, non-

vocalization, musical dynamics, reprises, and a stage-band, Brecht and Weill disrupted

the flow of continuous music, thus ensuring that *Mahagonny* is not entirely consumed

by the inherent culinary aspect attributed to the use of continuous music. By

juxtaposing traditional operatic techniques with non-traditional ones, Brecht proposed to draw attention to the operatic techniques he viewed as flawed.

Changes and Omissions: The Struggle between Brecht and Weill

By the time Brecht and Weill had reached the *Mahagonny* stage in their collaborative relationship, their opinions, ideologies and theories had started to diverge. Aside from Brecht and Weill's struggle between the roles of lyricist and composer, Brecht at this time was becoming increasingly Marxist, which did not suit Weill's ideology. This divergence of views inevitably led to a clash in the collaboration of *Mahagonny*. As David Chisholm compares in his *Brecht Yearbook* article:

> Whereas Brecht emphasizes the independence of the text and the 'separation of the elements' i.e., text, music, and stage set (including projections), Weill views the *music* as the dominant cohesive force that gives unity to the opera. [104]

This difference in opinions led to a constant battle between Brecht and Weill. I have already engaged in Brecht's concept of the separation of the elements which he used in order to prevent a piece from becoming too culinary. Weill, on the other hand, viewed that in opera, the driving force was the music. With the employment of continuous music there is no question about the reality of the content of the play being presented, because there is nothing realistic about continuous music and singing. Brecht says himself of Weill's compositions:

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[104] Chisholm, D. "Brecht and Weill's Views of *Mahagonny*: Musical-Textual Tensions" *Mahagonny.com: The Brecht Yearbook 29*, eds Silberman, M. & Vassen, F, 184.

So-called 'cheap' music, particularly that of the cabaret and the operetta, has for some time been a sort of gestic music. Serious music, however, still clings to lyricism, and cultivates expression for its own sake. The opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* showed the application of the new principles on a fairly large scale. [105] This statement confirms that Brecht was not completely dissatisfied with the final result of the opera. It seems that he was quite proud of the application of music in *Mahagonny.* But at the same time there were numerous battles between Brecht and Weill during the derision of *Mahagonny.*

Brecht and Weill struggled over each of their roles within their musical collaborations. Weill very clearly viewed that music was the dominant force in opera. Weill elucidates this relationship in *Melos* magazine when stating that there was no need to make the "relationship between music and text into one of dependence, subordination or at best parity. The more powerful the writer, the greater his ability to adjust himself to the music". [106] The later part of this statement should be further emphasized as it is clear that Weill expected Brecht to adhere to his musical compositions. Weill clarified that it was the lyricist's role to follow the music and resistance to this was a sign of an ineffective writer. Brecht had quite the opposite opinion. He felt that the text and music should operate in stark contrast to one another and that the text should not be compromised by the music. This can be observed with the example of the size of the original orchestra in comparison with a later production of *Mahagonny.* The orchestra in the original was scored for roughly forty players

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[105] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 87.
[106] Willett, J. & Manheim, R. "Introduction" *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 3,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, xi.

(including strings, which Brecht had voiced a dislike of); this was not including the stage band of twenty-one players. David Drew suggests that the music was rescored and scaled down for the Paris performance of 1932 which allowed the orchestra to function as less of an opera orchestra and more of a dance band. [107] Brecht faced a constant struggle to ensure that the music played a secondary role to the text and hoped that by reducing the size of the orchestra it would not over-take his lyrics.

The biggest struggle for Brecht and Weill was the constant balancing of the music against the text and/or the text against the music. Eric Bentley, who was a close co-worker to Brecht later in his life, observed that:

> *Mahagonny* gave pleasure willy-nilly before Brecht arrived at that conclusion, and Kurt Weill's score is *pure* fun. At any rate it is much closer to being pure fun than Brecht's libretto is, and some fun-lovers will therefore wish this opera were being performed in a language they did not understand. [108]

Perhaps Bentley is hitting at the root of the battle between the forces of seriousness and pleasure, text and music and ultimately Brecht and Weill. And this struggle is reflected in the opera *Mahagonny* where Jim is constantly battling against his own desire for pleasure. It seems that the modern director or researcher is caught in a struggle between emphasizing the music or enhancing the text, in much the same way that the character Jim has to choose between his desire or his morals. *Mahagonny* hits at the core of human nature as so often humans give into their own desires. This can be seen with the Ernst-Josef Aufricht production of *Mahagonny* in Berlin in December 1931.

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[107] Willett, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, 132.
[108] Bentley, E. *The Brecht Commentaries,* (London: Methuen, 1981) 284.

Brecht was dissatisfied with the final musical fabrication to such an extent that he created a scene so explosive that the lawyers of the Theater am Kurfürstendamm threatened to cancel the production. Eventually Brecht was convinced to leave the show and was appeased by being allowed to rehearse *The Mother* in the theatre's basement. [109] This ordeal clearly demonstrates how Weill was favoured over Brecht, thus the fun and pleasure of the music winning out over the text. My theory is also confirmed from the fact that the highly popular "Alabama Song" contains nothing of Brecht – only Weill's music and Elisabeth Hauptmann's English words. In a way, Brecht's text from *Mahagonny* was extinguished in popular English culture in the same way Jim was removed from the Mahagonny of the opera.

In conclusion, the play *Mahagonny*, in almost every sense, is a true opera. This is due to the fact that Brecht and Weill used operatic techniques in order to highlight the flaws of traditional opera and make it accessible to the prominent opera audiences. And *Mahagonny*, much like *The Threepenny Opera* makes use of several of Brecht's primary Epic Theatre theories. Both plays borrow traditional techniques from opera in order to draw attention to the genre. *Mahagonny* takes this one step further by qualifying as a proper opera and thus questions the operatic genre to the opera audience. So in essence *Mahagonny* is an opera commenting on opera. Both plays make use of Brecht's montage effect by breaking up the flow of the plot with various methods. *The Threepenny Opera* makes ample use of song placement between the spoken parts as a means to create a disjointed flow. Since *Mahagonny* has continuous music, Brecht used

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[109] Kowalke, K. "Brecht and Music: theory and practice of theatre" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht,* Second Edition eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 251.

the text and language to dispel any emotional build. Both plays employ the use of

gestus, however vague this concept is, as well as a separation of the elements. So

however different in form these two shows are, they still hark strikingly back to

Brecht's theories. *Mahagonny* conforms to the Epic Music structure more so than *The*

Threepenny Opera. The biggest struggle for *Mahagonny* was between the prominence

of the music against the text. It was important for Brecht and Weill to find the perfect

balance of the culinary so that this play could be accepted by opera audiences, but at the

same time adhere to the Epic Theatre structure. But the culinary aspect of *Mahagonny*

is what keeps it from being a flawless piece of Epic Theatre. So although *Mahagonny*

has fewer discrepancies with the Epic Music model than *The Threepenny Opera,* neither

of them are flawless examples of Epic Theatre. This perhaps could be due to an idea I

touched on in my previous chapter, that the Epic theories were worked out over time

and were not finalized at this point in Brecht's career.

Although *Mahagonny* was a culinary opera it had to be culinary in order to

address the traditional opera spectators and to be a tool to comment on the operatic

format of the time. In order to resist the monotony of continuous music and maintain

the disjointed montage effect of his Epic Theatre theories, Brecht employed the use of

English lyrics to break up the flow of the German text. Brecht and Weill also used

various musical and operatic techniques in order to clarify the emphasis of text and

frame significant aspects of the plot. The final result of the opera *Mahagonny* was

continuously affected by the dynamics of the two men and their relentless struggle

between which element should hold prominence. This struggle has followed

Mahagonny to this day as there is still no certainty as to if the music or the text should be given emphasis. *Mahagonny* highlighted the beginning of the end for Brecht and Weill's collaborations. Although they collaborated on a few more plays after *Mahagonny*, none of them were as successful, much of which may have been attributed to the tension held between these two men. After Brecht and Weill went into exile, Weill eventually found himself in New York with success on Broadway working with the likes of Ira Gershwin, Alan Jay Lerner, Maxwell Anderson and Langston Hughes. He even had several of his musicals adapted into Hollywood movies starring famous film-musical stars such as Ginger Rogers. Although his Broadway productions did not hold the same grittiness that is found with his Brecht pieces, they were still influential in their own way dealing with such subjects as Fascism, Jewish tradition, mental instability and African American politics. Weill's musical shift is best summed up by the critic Elliot Carter in a review of his show *One Touch of Venus* in which Carter remarks that the show:

> reveals his mastery of Broadway technique. Apparently he can turn out one
> success after another with a sure hand...Where in pre-Hitler days his music
> underlined the bold and disillusioned bitterness of economic injustice, now,
> reflecting his new environment and the New York audiences to which he appeals,
> his social scene has shrunk to the bedroom and he has become the composer of
> "sophisticated scores". [110]

It seems then that the fundamental difference between Brecht and Weill was their reaction to the politics surrounding them. While Weill reacted to the climate he was immersed in and from this produced music reflecting the situation, Brecht aimed to

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[110] Jarmon, D. *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Biography,* (London: Orbis Publishing, 1982) 78-79.

provoke social change through the manipulation of his society. Once Brecht and Weill split, Brecht found comfort in the musical and political compositions of the composer Hanns Eisler which I will explore in the following chapter.

The Mother

Synopsis:

This play follows Pelagea Vlassova, mother to the young Pavel who is active in the movement for the proletariat. Vlassova at first rejects Pavel's association with the Communist movement, but as the play progresses she slowly finds herself taking part in protesting, pamphlet making and distribution. After a large demonstration on May Day, Pavel is arrested, at which point Vlassova is taken to live with the Teacher, where she learns to read and continues with her participation in the movement. Vlassova visits her son in prison where she garners the names of fellow peasants who support the movement. After a trip to the country to gather the peasant's support, Vlassova returns to the Teacher's house to find Pavel back from a long period of exile in Siberia only to say he is leaving again. Pavel is shot while trying to cross the Finish border and Vlassova is devastated by his loss. The chorus is left to rouse her out of bed and remind her that the party needs her, and that there has been a newly declared war.   This brings Vlassova to her feet and the show closes with Vlassova and the chorus engaged in a demonstration for the movement and a sense that the war has just begun.

Song Listing:

1.   Overture (Ouvertüre) – Orchestra

2.   "Like the Raven" (*Wie die Krähe) –* Mezzo-Soprano Solo and the Chorus

3.   "The Answer" (*Das Lied von der Suppe) –* Masha and the Chorus

4.   "Song of the Patches and the Coat" (*Der zerrissene Rock) –* Chorus

5. "Report on May Day" (*Gedanken über die rote Fahne)* – Mezzo-Soprano Solo and the Chorus

6. "Praise of Communism" (*Lob des Kommunismus)* – Vlassova

7. "Praise of Learning" (*Lob des Lernens)* – Mezzo-Soprano Solo and the Chorus

8. "Praise of the Revolution" (*Lob eines Revolutionärs)* – Vlassova and the Chorus

9. "To be Sung in a Prison" (*Im Gefängis zu singen)* – Pavel

10. "Praise of the Vlassovas" (*Lob der Wlassowas)* – Estate Cook and the Chorus

11. "Praise of the Third Thing" (*Lob der dritten Sache)* – Vlassova

12. "Funeral Oration" (*Grabrede)* - Male Chorus

13. "The Party's Under Threat!" (*Steh auf!)* – Baritone Solo and the Chorus

14. "Praise of the Dialectic" (*Lob der Dialektik)* – Vlassova, Baritone and Mezzo-Soprano Solos and the Chorus [111]

The Mother was written in 1931-32 with Elisabeth Hauptmann, Slatan Dudow, Günther Weisenborn and Hanns Eisler. It was based on Maxim Gorky's novel of the same title written in 1907. It premiered in January of 1932 and ran for a month in Berlin; it then proceeded through several more revisions and performances. It was revived in 1935 in a New York production which ran for thirty-five performances at the Civic Repertory Theatre and in 1951 with the Berliner Ensemble at the Deutsches Theater. In fact there were five different versions of *The Mother* (including three different versions of the score and various concert stagings) but only two copies of the script have been published in the latest German edition of Brecht's collected works.

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[111] Eisler, H. & Brecht, B. *Die Mutter,* Audio Recording. (Corodella Radio Svizzera, CHAN 9820, 2000).

The script to the original 1932 production has been lost. [112]   It is important to highlight

the various revisions and changes to *The Mother*, not only to make the reader aware of

the material available, but also to find a greater understanding of the structure of the

play through these revisions. *The Mother* was not meant to be rigid in structure which

is supported in the numerous revisions. The fluid structure served as a means to make

the show adaptable for a large variety of communities. Brecht's theatre focused on

garnering specified reactions from the spectator and providing them with material to

contemplate. *The Mother* contains a strong message about Communism, which was not

a widely accepted principle at the time, and therefore the play needed to be adaptable so

that it could be accepted by a large variety of spectators.

I am using the German to English translations of the song titles from the booklet

to the 1995 recorded compact disc of *The Mother* edited by Finn S. Gundersen as well

as from the Willett and Manheim translation of the play. The Willett and Manheim

translation is based on the 1957 revision of the play. The 1995 audio recording of *The

Mother* states that they are performing from the Universal Edition, but the Universal

Edition does not specify which year and revision they have printed from. This however

does not make this play any less significant within the canon of Brecht's work,

especially in reference to his Epic Theatre theories. Although there are various changes

to the text and the music, the general concepts and theories remain static. This is a point

I will aim to emphasize throughout the remainder of this chapter. Aspects of *The

Mother* are intentionally vague. For example, the characters are part of a worker's

movement in pre-revolutionary Russia but the particulars of the movement remain

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[112] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006) 8.

undefined. This unspecified detail allowed for *The Mother* to be flexible for a variety of situations, social environments and time periods. Therefore, even though there is no singular set of text and music to conduct my research from, *The Mother* is still essential to include in my Epic Music studies.

     The Mother was Brecht's third collaboration with the composer Hanns Eisler. Eisler belonged to the agit-prop [113] troupe, The Red Megaphone and wrote choral pieces for left-leaning choirs, which signified that he had a notable amount of experience in regards to the subject matter of the working class revolution portrayed in *The Mother*. [114] As Laura Bradley indicates in her book on *The Mother*, Eisler's music from *The Mother* was taken outside of the theatre and produced at concerts and also at rallies in 1932. [115] So unlike Weill's music which became successful with the middle-class theatre audience, Eisler's music was embraced by the very audience it was playing to. This then allowed for Brecht's text to exist outside of the realm of the theatre.   In this chapter I will examine several musical components that can be directly related to Brecht's Epic Theatre theories. I will first draw a correlation between Eisler's own theories and Brecht's. I will then look at the concept of catharsis in the song and how Eisler's decision of non-catharsis in his music relates directly to Brecht's Epic Theatre. I will also examine the use, role and purpose of a chorus in *The Mother*. And finally I will touch once again on the concepts of a separation of the elements and *gestus* as seen with Eisler's application of his music.

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[113] Agit-prop is derived from the Soviet Communist Party's Agitation and Propaganda Department which would perform short sketches to the Red Army during the Revolution – Brecht, B. Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* ed Willett, J. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 62.

[114] Bodek, R. *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht,* (Columbia, USA: Camden House, 1997) 60.

[115] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre,* 10.

Eisler's Epic Theatre

Most Brecht aficionados (including Willett and Bentley) and even Brecht himself will admit that Eisler was perhaps the most efficient and appropriate composer for Brecht's Epic Theatre.   Instead of Weill's heavy orchestrations, Eisler took a simpler approach. For example, the first run of *The Mother* consisted of an orchestra of a trumpet, trombone, percussion and piano. [116]   Also, where Weill's music blends new music with popular jazz, Eisler's music is reminiscent of antiquated Lieder and early music meshed with aspects of the New Music movement.   Whereas Weill's music is most appropriately heard in a smoky night club, Eisler's music has a sacred sound to it – calling to memory religious choir music – blended with the riveting beats of a march. It could be argued that Eisler's music is less culinary due to its surface level simplicity. But another reason Eisler's music shares a greater affinity with Brecht's work is due to the similarities of thought not only on theatrical theories, but also on political ones. This becomes apparent on closer examination of Eisler's own theories on Epic Music. In an essay written in 1932 titled "Our Music for the Struggle" Eisler writes:

The first demand that the class struggle makes of its battle songs is that they are readily intelligible, easy to understand, energetic, and precise. [117]   With this, Eisler expresses the view that the main requirement of music for the proletarian movement is that it must clearly communicate a message and provide an attitude that would energize the people. This idea is almost identical to Brecht's own theories on the purpose of music as a device which should be used to communicate instead of its Dramatic function as

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[116] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre,* 47.
[117] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre,* 44.

ornamentation. Congruent with Brecht's compare and contrast list in his *Mahagonny* notes, Eisler clearly delineates his own interpretation of the old and new functions of music in a lecture titled "The Crisis of Music". [118] In the text from this lecture, Eisler separates the various genres and forms of music and lists the old and new functions of each. I have chosen to select the genres which closely mirror Brecht's Epic Theatre theories to emphasize the correlation between the theories of the two men.

In Eisler's section on film music he dictates that the old function of music is that it illustrated mood whereas the new function is as musical commentary. This is almost identical to Brecht's sentiment that music should take a position in Epic Theatre instead of its Dramatic function of illustrating. Although Brecht engaged in very little film music, this theory still holds true in his Epic Theatre as well. The one film that Brecht and Eisler produced together is called *Kühle Wampe* in 1932. The film engaged with unemployment and poverty in Berlin. It is almost entirely composed of image, and sound/music with little narration. This film employs musical commentary through a separation of music and emotions. During highly climactic scenes, like the young man's suicide, there is complete silence. Long musical sections are primarily used for non-emotionally charged scenes, like when the characters are dining or during a montage of images of factories. Equal weight is always given to the music and the image and the volume of the music is never lowered to give prominence to text. Therefore instead of acting as a mood heightener, the music plays its own equal and separate role within the movie and gives its own comment on the situation.

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[118] Eisler, H. *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings,* ed Grabs, M. (Berlin: Seven Seas, 1978) 117-119. For the remainder of this section I will be referring to these pages throughout.

In regards to the new function, Brecht claimed that the music should take a position, in other words music should communicate a political or social stance. Eisler indicated that the new function of music should be used as a musical commentary, therefore music which comments on the surrounding situation. The chorus numbers in *The Mother* function as both a commentary on the action and also take a political stance. For example, the song "Report on May Day" embodies a political message. The characters have gathered together on May Day in order to hold a strike against a wage cut. The song very clearly dictates that the protesting will only end once the workers have conquered in the Bolshevik struggle. Smilgin, a factory worker who has been with the movement for twenty years, is proudly holding the red flag. When Smilgin refuses to hand over the flag to the officer who demands it, he is shot dead. Instead of being defeated by this shocking incident, Vlassova picks up the flag and says that she will carry it, thus confirming that the protesting will continue at any expense. The song itself functions as a rally song with short repetitions, a single voice beginning with the verse and the chorus joining in agreement. Therefore the music in *The Mother* clearly takes a position both musically and textually in accordance to Brecht and Eisler's theories.

In his section on songs, Eisler indicated that the old use of a song was performed by a specialist to passive listeners, whereas the new use of a song should be sung by the masses on the streets, in workshops or at meetings. He lists that the new use of the song should be activating for the audience or group that it is written for. This is extremely similar to Brecht's comparison of Dramatic and Epic Theatre. Brecht states that

Dramatic Theatre has the capacity for action, but that Epic Theatre arouses action. Both men argue that the old use of music provides for a lethargic and passive audience that does not incite passion or desire for change. Brecht and Eisler maintain that the new use of music should incite action. This can be seen clearly with the songs in *The Mother* as they were structured after fight songs and were used in concerts and rallies. For example, the song "Like the Raven", as Richard Bodek comments, is similar to the agit-prop song "Fight Hunger" which was also written by Eisler, urging the proletarians to stand up against the rich. [119]   Since the songs from *The Mother* were used at rallies and in concert versions this supports the fact that their music was used for much more than just theatre music.

In Eisler's section on opera and operettas, he concludes that the old function of music was weakened by the need to achieve theatrical effects whereas the new function should be used as a social commentary that destructs the conventional operatic effects. This is similar to Brecht's intention with both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* and is mirrored in his notes to *Mahagonny* stating that the new Epic role of music is to communicate whereas the function of Dramatic Music is to merely add spectacle. The proposal that Dramatic Theatre's use of music compromised or weakened its purpose is what Brecht occupied most of his career exploring and reacting against in his anti-culinary theatre. Both men agreed that the new use of music should communicate and comment, and this is exactly what they both strive towards with their music in *The Mother.* This can be seen in the example of the song "Report on May Day" and the use of the songs as communication tools outside of the theatre.

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[119] Bodek, R. *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin,* 61-62.

Eisler then further comments on the use of music in theatre and lists the old purpose of music as a device that produces atmospheric illusion and which is integral to the play. In contrast, he states that the new use of music should be as an independent element that comments on the situation. This is strikingly close to Brecht's statement that Dramatic Music paints the psychological situation whereas Epic Music gives the attitude. Setting an atmospheric illusion refers to the idea of music divulging insight into the nature of the play. For example, if a play were to open with chamber music it would set a very different atmosphere than if it opened with punk music. Brecht cited that the old function of music was for painting a psychological situation. This is slightly different than atmospheric setting because it relates to the concept of divulging insight into a person or character's inner psyche instead of the entirety of the play itself. Brecht contrasts this to the new function of music, that of setting the attitude of the moment. This concept of attitude is closely linked to *gestus* which I have discussed previously and which I will analyse again later in this chapter. But attitude refers to something much more superficial than inner psyche. Attitude can only make a comment on the psychological state of a character or their social situation, but cannot give an accurate portrayal of the inner psyche of a character. This can be related to Eisler's sentiment on the new use of music functioning as an independent element commenting on the situation. Dramatic Music functions as an introspective tool focusing on the inner thoughts and emotions of its characters. Brecht however viewed this introspective aspect as being too persuasive over the spectator's reason and therefore proposed the theory of using comment and alienation to prevent this. The more superficial commentary of the Epic Theatre encouraged free-thinking on the audience's behalf.

The idea of reason over emotion plays directly into Brecht's theories on maintaining a separation of the elements. With this theory, Brecht insists that all elements must function on their own in order to avoid a culinary mush. Eisler specifically insists that the music should operate separately from the rest of the elements of the theatre. The ability for a song to comment on the situation, instead of divulging the character's inner thoughts, creates a separation of the song from the character who is singing it. Therefore, Brecht and Eisler had strikingly similar theories on the role of music in the theatre which could account for the affinity these two theatrical collaborators had for one another. This was apparent not only in their writings on theatre but also with the cohesion that their plays held when placed against the Epic Theatre structure.

Absence of Catharsis

I have already touched on the absence of catharsis within Brecht's Epic Theatre in my previous chapters, and since it is a central concept to Epic Theatre I will return to it once again. Without a catharsis at the end of a play, Brecht maintained that the spectator would reserve the opinions and thoughts that he or she had formed throughout the duration of the piece. Eisler also incorporated this idea of catharsis into his compositions. He did this by including new rhythms at the final bars of songs or ending with abrupt chords. [120] This can be seen very clearly with the "Song of the Patches and the Coat". This song begins with the male chorus singing softly and then the female chorus slowly entering through alternating lines and soft harmonies. The song swells

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[120] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre*, 48.

with the engagement of the entire chorus singing in their full voices. It then concludes

with a singular loud chord from the piano. Considering the length of the build of the

song, this ending seems extremely abrupt and unfinished. The grand swell of the chorus

calls for a long ending as a complement to this build, but Eisler does not allow us this

catharsis. Instead he ends this exuberant song on a singular loud chord. This jarring

ending is not peaceful and does not sound resolved. This unresolved sound plays

directly into Brecht's theories on catharsis. Brecht did not want his spectators to

experience a catharsis with his theatre for fear that they would then be purged of all of

their opinions and reasoning with regards to the situation. By having a lack of catharsis

Brecht felt that the spectators could leave his theatre full of agitation and longing for

change. Eisler also employed this theory with his music, as this abrupt ending calls

attention to the finale of the song, or lack of. Therefore the final sentiment of the song

is not washed away with a sentimental ending, but is punctuated with a musical

exclamation point when the chorus cries out to the government and the upper classes

"But what have you to offer us", thus drawing the listening spectator's ear to this

climactic statement of the song. [121]

Secondly, the absence of a catharsis can be seen with the "Funeral Oration".

Traditionally the concept of a funeral relies entirely on ritual and catharsis for the

people the deceased has left behind. A funeral allows for friends and family to unite,

say a final farewell and leave with the sense that the deceased has been laid to rest. The

"Funeral Oration" is inserted as an audio and visual projection of a letter that Vlassova

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[121] Brecht, B. "The Mother" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R. (London: Methuen, 1997) 107.

reads. Vlassova is at a table reading her letter, the chorus act out a tableau of the events and the song plays like a funeral dirge with the male chorus singing in unison, which is reminiscent of the holy chants of monks. Although this song does offer a bit of catharsis with a played out ending, the lack of catharsis comes through the intent and content of the oration. Traditionally, funeral eulogies offer catharsis via a reliving of the deceased through speeches about him or her. The "Funeral Oration" in *The Mother* on the other hand, offers little about the character of Pavel, but lists in detail the moments before his death, but not the death itself. [122] This builds a tension between the intent of the music, which is a eulogy, and that of the text which offers no resolution of Pavel's death. This un-resolution falls at a pivotal moment in the text because Pavel's death was devastating for Vlassova's character. Additionally the song highlights the fact that Pavel's death was unnecessary. The song indicates that the men who shot Pavel were of the same social class and tells of Pavel's recognition of them not being un-teachable.   This therefore becomes a turning point for Vlassova's character and the ultimate test to her dedication to the party and the worker's cause. Pavel's death could be a potentially Dramatic and emotional moment in the plot, which is why it was important for a catharsis to be avoided in this song.   If a catharsis had been allowed, the spectator could have purged his or her emotions regarding Pavel's unjustified death. Therefore, with the use of a non-catharsis in his music, Eisler is able to create songs which cater to Brecht's Epic Theatre.

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[122] Calico, J. *Brecht at the Opera,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008) 59.

On the Use of a Chorus

The Mother makes ample use of a chorus with the majority of its musical numbers assigned to a group of actors instead of a singular character. The chorus serves numerous functions within this piece. They serve as a representation of the masses, a tool to distil the emotional build, a means to communicate a social and political message, as well as a reflection of the desired impact that Brecht wished to evoke in his audience. As Brecht states; "In reality it is no special chorus. The chorus can take many parts". [123]   One of the main functions of the chorus was for it to set an attitude for the spectators. Brecht did not intend for the chorus to represent specific sub-groups or minorities, but wanted them to represent a variety of roles based on the reflection of current events and the spectator's communities. Brecht hoped that the chorus would stimulate the thoughts of the spectator, thus serving as a tool to comment on the action of the play and help incite critical thinking.

Brecht indicated that the songs in *The Mother* should be directed at the audience for the original production. [124]   This meant that all of the songs were addressed to the audience instead of to another character. This technique served to break the fourth wall and was used to induce the alienation effect. By directly addressing the audience, this not only allowed for the message of the song to be clearly intended for the ears of the spectator, but also served as a reminder to the audience of their role as a spectator within a theatre. For example, with the song "Praise of Communism" one of Vlassova's

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[123] Brecht, B. "Texts by Brecht and Eisler" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 259.

[124] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 61.

co-campaigners questions her as to why Communism is seen as evil. Vlassova then responds to this question with the above song. If the song were then to be directed at the audience instead of at the co-campaigner, the audience would take on the role of the co-campaigner or the question asker. The spectator would become an active player within the scene. Also, the intentions of the song would shift. Instead of Vlassova convincing her co-campaigner of the goodness behind Communism, the audience would transform into the ones requiring the convincing. Thus the role of the spectator morphs depending on whom the songs are addressed to. When the songs are directed specifically to the audience, the spectator takes on an active role in the production thus negating their ability to passively watch.

In Eisler's "The Crisis of Music", he lists a category referring directly to the old and new functions of choral music. In this text he dictates that the old use of music was as "a mechanical transposition of the expression of an individual into a collective body," and uses the example of "a solo sung by a chorus of one hundred people" proclaiming "I cannot explain my sadness". He then goes onto describe the new use of music as a worker's choir which "undertakes the teaching of mass songs and fighting songs to the audience" and which also will "make possible the learning and presentation of theoretical sayings" as well to "Create models for didactic pieces". [125] This comparison is apparent in the use of the choir music in *The Mother*. As Brecht indicated above, the chorus does not represent any one unified group (as with the old function of music) but takes on a variety of roles. Also the chorus numbers do not focus on the emotional state of any group or single character but, in most cases, dictate a general reflection on the

[125] Eisler, H. *A Rebel in Music,* 118.

social situation. For example the play opens with Vlassova explaining to the audience

that she is ashamed because she cannot afford to feed her son. The chorus enters with

the song "Like a Raven" which does not aim to comfort or express Vlassova's

emotions, but offers such lines as:

Whatever you do

You'll still have to struggle

Your position is bad

It'll worsen.

This cannot go on, but

What is to be the answer? [126]

The chorus identifies the problem but does not give a solution, thus allowing the

spectator to question the horrible situation that Vlassova finds herself and to formulate

his or her own solutions to the problem. If the majority of the chorus numbers were

directed to the audience, then the songs could be used as a means to incite critical

thinking and action in the spectators. Additionally, since many of the songs from *The

Mother* were used in concerts and rallies, the chorus, in a way, was presenting and

teaching these songs to the spectator for use as a fighting song.

Brecht encouraged directors to experiment with his texts within the limits of his

Epic Theatre format. For example, for the 1932 production of *The Mother*, Brecht

suggested that the chorus be placed in the audience. [127]   This would abolish the distance

between the actors and the spectators.   Brecht further suggested that the chorus be

[126] Brecht, B. "The Mother" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 96.
[127] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre,* 9.

placed in seats dispersed throughout the audience and marvelled at the concept of having a chorus member sitting next to a spectator while reciting or singing his or her text. This closeness, Brecht felt, would make the audience and the chorus one, therefore the sentiment of the chorus could be echoed in the mind of the spectator. The chorus was used as a tool to arouse questions within the audience. Although Brecht proclaimed that his Epic Theatre promotes free-thinking on the spectator's part, it is apparent that Brecht still exerted a certain amount of control over the way in which his audience experienced the theatre. This paradox is something I will explore further in the conclusion of my paper.

Another technique employed with the chorus is the use of unison speech over music, as with the song "Praise of the Vlassovas". This is similar to the use of speech over music as seen in *The Threepenny Opera's* "Walk to the Gallows". The primary difference in this case is that the unison speech is performed by a group of voices instead of a single voice, which harkens back to the concept of a traditional Greek chorus. The significance of this technique is its ability to draw attention to this point in the play due to its uniqueness. This song seems unfamiliar or strange because it is the only song that utilizes unison speech throughout. This song is placed at the moment when the peasants join Vlassova's side, thus emphasizing the importance of her triumph. Another aspect that unison speech has over a singular voice is the impact that a large volume of voices has over its listeners. To further emphasize this number, it was intentional that the rest of the chorus sections were sung. When writing about the Theatre Union's production, Eisler heavily critiqued the way in which it was sung,

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stating that the actors were unable to sing without emotion and were unable to achieve the desired tempo. [128]   Although he was extremely dissatisfied with their performance, he never proposed to correct this by having the chorus speak instead of sing. [129]   This indicates that the music and singing chorus were essential to the structure of *The Mother* as Eisler could have alleviated this problem by cutting out the chorus numbers entirely or having them spoken instead of sung. A possible reason why the singing chorus was important to *The Mother* was because when the masses come together to sing there is a sense of unity. When a song is presented with a chorus there is the idea that the masses have been joining together in order to learn these songs. This evokes the idea of conspiracy and unity against the enemy.

Although there is much fluidity and revision within the text and the score, it is apparent that Eisler and Brecht intended for the music and the chorus to be an integral aspect to the play. The reason that the chorus was essential is illustrated in all of my above examples. The chorus functioned as representations of the masses but also took on a variety of roles. The chorus could prevent the build of emotions in a potentially climactic scene and were used as a tool to illustrate social and political message. The chorus helped engage the audience in active questioning of the events taking place and were also used to emphasize important moments in the plot through their ability to make the familiar seem unfamiliar.

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[128] Eisler, H. "Texts by Brecht and Eisler" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 361.
[129] Calico, J. *Brecht at the Opera*, 62.

Separation of the Elements

I have previously explored Brecht's idea of the separation of elements in my

chapters on Epic Theatre and *The Threepenny Opera*. I once again return to this theory

not only because of its use in *The Mother*, but also because of the similarity between

Eisler's own theories on the concept. When composing his music Eisler maintained that

it was important to keep each instrument separate from one another as indicated in his

essay "Modern Instrumentation" published in 1939 and in which he declares that:

Nowadays we prefer... an instrumentation in which the instruments retain their solo

character, instead of being mixed into porridge as in the previous century. [130]

This comment is similar to Brecht's assertions on culinary theatre right down to the

allegorical idea of porridge. This sentiment is mirrored in Eisler's composition. On an

initial listen to the music in *The Mother* the music sounds very simple and sparse, which

is quite dissimilar to the heavy orchestrations that Weill composed for *Mahagonny*.

Although the music may sound simple, it is quite complex, but this surface simplicity is

due to Eisler's use of a separation between each instrument.   Although each individual

instrument in his orchestration may be playing something quite complex, it is easy to

determine one instrument from the next, thus disallowing any instrument getting lost in

the "porridge". This separation maintains that the ear will not be overwhelmed with

too many instruments or notes, but forces the listener to continually be aware of each

instrument, thus making him or her aware of the music itself. This plays directly into

Brecht's theory of the alienation effect which does not allow the spectator (or listener in

this case) to become excessively involved with the material being presented to him or

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[130] Bradley, L. *Brecht and Political Theatre,* 47.

her, but maintains that the spectator keeps an awareness of him or herself within the theatrical situation.

Aside from the separation of elements with each individual instrument, Eisler also strove for a separation between the accompaniment and the vocal line through use of non-static tempi, as Eisler confirms in the following statement:

In the studying of such music it is absolutely necessary to avoid all rigid conceptions of tempi. To get the proper tempo it is necessary to try out various tempi. In the beginning this naturally causes great difficulties for the musicians.[131]

By allowing for fluidity in the music, this engages a separation not only among the various instruments in the orchestra, but also a separation between the accompaniment and the vocal line. If each musician within a song is expected to engage in a non-rigid tempo, this will force the musicians, at times, to play against one another. This will not only create a separation from instrument to instrument, but will also provide that the vocal line does not become static or reliant on the accompaniment for direction of tempo. In turn it ensures that the listener does not become fixed to the tempo either, but can expect to hear the unexpected. Similarly with patterns in tonal structure and chords, the ear also develops a pattern for rhythm. So in the same sense, if the ear becomes used to a certain pattern in rhythm and then this rhythm is disrupted by one or more musicians in a song, the ear will register this as strange or unfamiliar, thus highlighting this moment in the music. These disruptions can be placed at integral

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[131] Eisler, H. "Texts by Brecht and Eisler" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 361.

moments in the songs to be used as punctuation. Because of the fluidity of the music in *The Mother*, these musical punctuations create different sub-texts for the song. The music can be adapted within the confines of the text as well as for use outside of the theatre.

Another tool that engages a separation of the elements is the physical use of the musicians on stage. Both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* play with this concept and it is apparent that Brecht envisioned this method for *The Mother* as well. This is indicated in Brecht's following review of the New York production:

> But as the pianos were not illuminated during the musical numbers it looked as though there had merely been no room for them anywhere else. [132]

This quote enforces the intention of the use of the physical representation of music, but also highlights the concept that more is needed than purely placing the orchestra on stage, but attention must be drawn to this placement in order to achieve the desired effect of a separation of elements. It must be made abundantly clear that the orchestra was placed in sight on purpose; otherwise the audience could create a different rationale for the decision. But this critique of the New York production does confirm that the use of illuminated instruments was employed in *The Mother* thus adding to the concept of a separation of elements.

Another act of separation in *The Mother* lies with the song "To Be Sung in a Prison". The instructions for this song indicate that it should be sung by the actor playing Pavel. This maintains a separation between the actor and the character he is

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[132] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 82.

playing. In every other case the text indicates which character is to sing which song, but with this piece it specifically calls for the actor to sing it. This song falls at a potentially emotional juncture in the play, as Vlassova visits her son in prison. Perhaps this separation between actor and character is intentional to dissipate any emotions that could naturally build from the situation. If the spectator is reminded that it is an actor on stage and not a real person, then the audience is free to spectate with reason instead of emotion and can offer a critical and rational analysis of the moment. Therefore a separation of elements can be found in all elements of *The Mother* and helps to maintain the alienation effect which was instrumental to Brecht's Epic theories. As I have indicated above, Brecht intended for this play be open to interpretation so that it could be accessible for various audiences and social contexts. This means, much like the text, Eisler encouraged the musicians to challenge the structure of the music as well, and that nothing written on the page was meant to be taken at face value. Thus the intent of the play, text, music and creators all seemed to be in harmony with one another.

The Concept of *Gestus* Revisited

I once again find it necessary to return to the idea of *gestus* since Brecht referred to this concept on numerous occasions in regards to the music in *The Mother*. As I previously elucidated in my discussions on *gestus* in both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny,* the concept was never clearly defined, but only alluded to. It can be determined that *gestus* is strongly linked to song and communication. For example

Brecht maintained that if the actor does not perform the proper *gestus* then the intent of the song is lost, as illustrated in the following quote:

> It is, however, clear that the effectiveness of this kind of music largely depends on the way in which it is performed. If the actors do not start by getting hold of the right gest then there is little hope that they will be able to carry out their task of stimulating a particular approach in the spectator. [133]

This statement indicates that *gestus* is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the music, but considering Brecht never gave a clear indicator of what the proper *gestus* should be for each consecutive song, or really even a clear definition of what *gestus* is at all, this becomes particularly problematic as seen in the New York production of *The Mother*. When Brecht no longer was the director and his control over the production was diminished he found much fault in the execution of the direction over *gestus*, as indicated in the following quotation:

> Because the director felt that the singer's groupings and gest were not the composer's business, some numbers were stripped of their effect by a distortion of the political sense. [134]

Eisler was the acting composer at the New York production, so he would have been familiar with the *gestus* and groupings used at previous productions. This statement also highlights the correlation between music, *gestus* and the composer's role within the production. Brecht insisted that the composer should play an integral role in the direction of the musical numbers. This sentiment is clearly mirrored in Brecht's

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[133] Calico, J. *Brecht at the Opera,* 61.
[134] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 82.

collaborative nature where his composers became co-creators to more than just the synthesis of the music.

Brecht writes that the *gestus* is not only apparent in the stage direction, but also within the music itself. In regards to the song "Praise of Communism", Brecht states:

> In the place in which the accusation that communism creates chaos is contradicted, the music obtains through its friendly, advisory gestus a hearing, so to speak, for the voice of reason. [135]

He then goes on to say in reference to the song "Praise of Learning":

> In the piece 'Lob des Lernens,' in which the question of a seizure of power by the proletariat is linked with the question of learning, the music provides gestures that are heroic, and hence of natural cheerfulness. [136]

In both cases Brecht links the concept of musical meaning through *gestus*. "Praise of Communism" infers a friendly *gestus* and the "Praise of Learning" provokes cheerfulness. These statements therefore highlight Brecht's belief that music is able to communicate a message. He does not however go into detail as to how the music or *gestus* delivers a friendly or heroic tone (or how there is a link between cheerfulness and heroism or friendliness and reason). If, however, there were a *gestus* imparted to the spectator, it would provide an interesting context to both of these songs. With the example "Praise of Communism", the co-campaigner remarks to Vlassova that "We've

[135] Fowler, K. *Received Truths: Bertolt Brecht and the Problem of Gestus and Musical Meaning,* (New York: AMS Press, 1991) 13.
[136] Betz Betz, A. *Hanns Eisler Political Musician,* trans Hopkins, B. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 109.

been told Communism is a crime", to which Vlassova responds with the song. [137]

Therefore by juxtaposing something that is supposedly criminal, such as Communism, with a friendly *gestus* Brecht aimed to provoke the spectator into questioning the validity behind the claim that Communism was a crime. In the second example, "Praise of Learning", various students, comprised of older women, were being taught to read by the Teacher. The Teacher only wants to teach them simple and harmless words, but the students want to learn words relevant to the rise of the proletariat. With this song the Teacher does not want to provide the students with the knowledge that they long for, but the learners urge that knowledge is the best weapon. [138] Therefore if the concept of heroism could be evoked in the form of a *gestus*, then this concept of knowledge as a heroic fighting tool would be clearly illustrated. In both cases the *gestus* would add a strong buttress to the overall context of the scenes. However, there is the dilemma of the cloudy definition of the word *gestus* and how it should be executed. The above examples give us the distinct impression that each song was intended to evoke a particular *gestus* but since little documentation has survived which specifies which *gestus* should accompany any given song, and how each *gestus* is to be achieved then the modern scholar is left with minimal source material when exploring the concept of *gestus* in music.

In conclusion, *The Mother* can be quite a difficult play to analyse because of its fluidity in music, text and setting in addition to its various revisions. It is important to emphasize that this fluidity is intrinsic to the very structure of the play. Brecht created

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[137] Brecht, B. "The Mother" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R, 116.
[138] Brecht, B. "The Mother" *Brecht Collected Plays: Vol 3 Part 2,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R*,* 120.

this play for any worker, anywhere and wanted it to be adaptable for various societies, which is why Brecht does not emphasize the foreign aspect of this play.   This is not a play about Russia, but it is a play about social movement and the workers struggle. This adaptability allows for *The Mother* to be accessible to a large variety of audiences, which is absolutely essential considering the politically controversial subject matter. Of my three case studies *The Mother* is the only one which does not stray away from the Epic structure Brecht delineated in his notes to *Mahagonny.* Several aspects of Brecht's Epic Theatre make themselves apparent in *The Mother* such as an absence of catharsis, separation of elements, *gestus* and the use of the alienation effect.   A large amount of this may be due to the duality between Brecht and Eisler's theories regarding music. These can be seen with the absence of catharsis in the final bars of Eisler's songs, the use of the chorus as a tool to engage with the spectator and also the use of a separation of the elements and *gestus*. Regardless of the issue behind the term *gestus*, *The Mother* adheres to the Epic Theatre structure flawlessly. This therefore leaves me to unpick the reasons behind this in comparison to the discrepancies found in both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* in order to formulate the role of Epic Music in Brecht's theatre.

Conclusion

Epic Music and Epic Theatre are inseparable as affirmed by the musicologist Kim

Kowalke when he wrote that: "Music serves as a pillar so central to many of his

theoretical constructs and as a parameter so determinant for the shape, diction and

delivery of his texts that Brecht's legacy cannot be fully understood or properly

assessed without reference to music". [139] My research stems from this recognition as I

would attest that Epic Music does play a central role in Brecht's theatre. My aim with

this dissertation is to determine the exact role that music plays within Epic Theatre.

Now that I have analysed my three case studies and placed their corresponding musical

aspects against the Epic Theatre framework, I can determine how music functions

within this framework. I have encountered several discrepancies when looking at the

execution of Epic Music, especially with Brecht's two earlier works, *The Threepenny

Opera* and *Mahagonny*.   These discrepancies include several musical numbers that do

not adhere to the Epic Music format. However, as I highlighted in my chapter on Epic

Theatre, Epic and Dramatic Theatre we not intended to be complete binaries. Therefore

these discrepancies could purely be due to the concept that Epic and Dramatic

techniques were intentionally utilized in the same piece of theatre. At the same time

though, theses discrepancies grew less and less over time with *The Threepenny Opera*

having the highest number and *The Mother* having none.   I believe a significant amount

of these discrepancies could be due to the progression of Brecht's Epic Theatre theories

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[139] Kowalke, K. "Brecht and Music: theory and practice of theatre" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht,* Second Edition eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 242.

during the creation of each of these plays. More importantly, I have uncovered several

faults within the Epic Theatre format as a whole. These include the un-elucidated

gestus; the reality behind a true separation of the elements; the concept of control over

another's reaction; as well the idea of financial success and popularity and how it

adheres to the Epic framework. I would therefore conclude that the theories behind

Epic Music cannot be analysed as a static set of rules but must be contextualized in the

gradual progression of Brecht's Epic Theatre theories. The reason I have come to this

conclusion is based on the development in alignment of the Epic theories against my

three case studies.   Another complication which I will address later in this conclusion is

Brecht's tendency to contradict himself in much of his own writing.   For the above

reasons I was ultimately led to the conclusion that there is no singular framework to

probe when researching the earlier works of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*

and it is not until *The Mother* that one is able to garner any consistency in terms of

Brecht's Epic Music.

The most significant support I have to validate my conclusion is the work compiled by

John Willett in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic.* As I stated in my

introduction, this book details Brecht's writings on Epic Theatre and is designed to

show how his theories were formed. From this book I am able to conclude that the last

article written about Epic Theatre before the creation and premiere of *The Threepenny*

Opera was in 1927. In this article Brecht explicitly stated that:

To expound the principles of the epic theatre in a few catch-phrases is not

possible. They still mostly need to be worked out in detail. [140]

Therefore it is clear that Brecht had not fully developed his theories prior to the creation

of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928. This indicates that *The Threepenny Opera* was a

way to experiment with his Epic theories and put them into practice. The same

conclusion can be made for *Little Mahagonny* which was created in 1927 and was a

precursor to the full length *Mahagonny* opera. The first definitive and solid outline of

Epic Theatre was Brecht's "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" printed in 1930

with the publication of the printed edition of *Mahagonny.* This affirms that his theories

did not take on certainty until after both *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera* were

written and premiered. Therefore it must be stressed that both of these two plays were

likely developed before his theories and must be contextualized as such. This is not to

say that *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera* do not adhere to some extent to the

Epic Theatre theories, but what I must highlight is that they adhere with a sense of

progression and therefore produce discrepancies. This is a theory I will endeavour to

establish throughout the remainder of this conclusion. But it must be stressed that one

cannot assume that the *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera* of their respective

premieres followed Brecht's Epic Theatre theories as found in modern translations, such

as Willett's.

All three plays, although each very different from one another, do adhere in parts

to the Epic Theatre model through the use of montage, absence of catharsis and the

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[140] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic,* ed Willett, J. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 23.

prominence of thought over experience. All three case studies incorporate the montage

effect through use of the juxtaposition of one scene to another with broken plot fuelled

by a narrative approach. The music in each case study largely contributes to the

montage effect. This is seen most clearly in the cases of *The Threepenny Opera* and

The Mother where the songs are placed at moments in the plot to break up the fluidity.

The majority of the content of each song does not push the plot forward but rather

comments on the situation. This is seen with the use of parallel situations. For

example, the content of a song does not often focus on a singular character, but instead

refers to the general society or a character outside of the play. However the situation

discussed mirrors either the character performing it or the surrounding scene.   Due to

its continuous music *Mahagonny* attains the montage effect in a slightly different

manner. A perfect example of this is demonstrated in the consumption scenes.   Each

scene is a juxtaposition of one character's demise to another's. The only aspect linking

these scenes is the general theme of destruction through excessiveness and the

repetitions of the "One Means to Eat" song. This creates a series of scenes that are not

directly related to one another, thus contributing to a montage effect. The use of

montage in each case study maintains that these plays are part of the Epic Theatre

structure.

Another Epic Theatre technique used by all three case studies is the absence of

catharsis. *The Threepenny Opera* avoids a catharsis in the third act finale with its grand

Deus ex Machina ending. Although the ending appears to be resolved, there is a strong

sentiment that real life does not conclude itself in the same way.   This denies the

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spectator a complete catharsis. *Mahagonny* avoids catharsis by repeatedly employing English lyrics at potentially climactic points in the plot in order to diffuse dramatic build.   For example, the "Benares-Song" is placed towards the end of the play when the company is ultimately forced to leave Mahagonny. This song is quite lengthy, entirely in English and involves most of the company. Since the audience of the time was comprised of German speakers with little knowledge of English, the lyrics would not have been understood by most of them. Instead of an emotional cry for help, this section would have been received as strange or unfamiliar. This could hinder the spectator in reaching a highly emotional state by asking them to question the use of the English lyrics. *The Mother* employs a different form of an absence of catharsis which can be seen in both the overall arch of the plot as well as with the individual songs. The play follows the rise of the character Vlassova in her fight for Communism. It ends with the full company engaged in a fight anthem leaving the impression that the war has only just begun and thus is unresolved. This prevents any sense of catharsis since there is no finality for the war and it is unknown which side will triumph. Additionally, Eisler incorporates an absence of catharsis in his music as many of his songs end abruptly with sharp chords (or a singular chord).   The absence of catharsis is yet another means to exclude the build and then release of emotions in Epic Theatre. Brecht theorized that through a catharsis the spectator could leave all feelings and thoughts behind him or her when exiting the theatre. Brecht aimed to activate his audience and wanted them to leave the theatre with an unresolved desire to make changes to the situations that were presented to them over the course of the play.

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Another basic component in Epic Theatre is the objective of inducing thought over feeling. As Brecht theorized, Epic Music served as a commentary on the action of the plot in contrast to Dramatic Music which served to heighten the emotions. The majority of the music in my three case studies adopts the Epic Music function, although there are some cases where the music functions in a more Dramatic manner. In order for a song to be observational, rather than as a means to create an experience, it would need to engage with a separation of the elements, induce the alienation effect or use a montage sequence as illustrated above. A separation of the elements is clearly seen in *The Threepenny Opera* songs with the use of the "song lighting".   By employing this separation between plot and song, it serves as an indicator that the songs are not linked to the emotional build of the plot but operate as separate components.

Although *Mahagonny* is significantly more culinary than my other two case studies, Brecht and Weill managed to incorporate Epic Music techniques with the use of the montage effect.   Weill elucidates this in his unpublished notes to *Mahagonny* in 1930 by stating that the scenes:

> constitute 'moral tableaux for the present day', projected on a large surface. It was a choice which allowed us to use the purest form of epic theatre, which is likewise the purest form of musical theatre. They make a sequence of twenty-one self-contained musical forms, each being a self-contained scene and each introduced by an inscription in narrative form. The music therefore no longer furthers the plot but only starts up once a situation has been arrived at. [141]

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[141] Weill, K. "Notes to my Opera *Mahagonny*" *Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays Vol 2 Part 3,* eds & trans Willett, J. & Manheim, R. (London: Methuen, 1979) 91- 92.

With this statement Weill is referring to the number format that *Mahagonny* is comprised of.   He is stating that each number is a unit unto its own and is juxtaposed against all of the other twenty sequences creating a montage effect.   His reference to music not furthering the plot is supported in this number format.   For example, as Brecht theorized, one of Dramatic Music's main functions is to further the plot and it is often inserted at points between scenes in order to bridge one scene to the next and further the action, or alternatively it is used to heighten the end of a scene thus propelling it into the next. The use of the number sequence in *Mahagonny* permits each sequence to stand on its own without a bridge from one scene to the next.   This imposes a montage effect on the opera and breaks up the flow of the action since the music from one scene does not spill over into another. This maintains that the music in *Mahagonny* does not further the plot, but merely exists within each numbered sequence as an individual unit.

Thirdly, the music in my last case study, *The Mother,* is entirely Epic because its main function is to comment on the action of the plot. Gilbert affirms this observation stating that *The Mother* is:

> The "classic" model of Brechtian epic theatre with music: a musical-dramatic piece with number form...combined with a relatively sophisticated musical idiom...which in a gestic manner supports the overall concept of a "theatre of alienation" designed to induce a rational response and reflection on the part of the audience. [142]

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[142] Gilbert, M. *Bertolt Brecht's Striving for Reason, even in music,* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988) 106.

The "theatre of alienation" can be seen with the assignment of the majority of the songs to the chorus. This defers any possible emotions as belonging to a group instead of to an individual. The songs which are given to specific characters are usually in response to a question or concern and are filled with further questioning, thus promoting critical thinking on the spectator's part. Pavel's jail song, which could possibly function as Dramatic Music, takes on more of an Epic tone when the stage directions indicate that the actor, and not Pavel, should perform this song, thus pushing a separation of the song from the character. All of these techniques are used in order to encourage the spectator to adopt a critical approach to theatre watching instead of an emotional one. Therefore, it is conclusive that music is an integral aspect to Epic Theatre. It is important that scholars and practitioners acknowledge music's role in Brechtian theatre because music is one of Brecht's primary tools to induce essential aspects of Epic Theatre such as the alienation effect, a separation of elements and *gestus*. When the music is disregarded, over looked or downplayed it can jeopardize an Epic piece of theatre as the music is instrumental to many of Brecht's plays. Therefore, even though I have concluded that Brecht's Epic theories developed over time, the plays *The Threepenny Opera, Mahagonny* and *The Mother* do follow the Epic format to some extent as seen with their use of montage, absence of catharsis and the use of reason instead of feeling.

Since Brecht operated as a collaborator, his co-workers contributed significantly to the progression of his theories. It has already been established that Brecht borrowed a large amount of his theories, as well as the name from Piscator. Weill was also a huge inspiration, and hindrance, to Brecht's theories. Although most Brecht critics will

attribute the idea of *gestus* to Brecht, it was Weill who first used the term in printed

form (although it remains unclear who came up with the term initially). But because of

the tensions between Brecht and Weill, it is impossible to determine the proper balance

between music and text in the cases of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*; but one

can conclude that Epic Music and Epic Theatre cannot operate without one another.

This is an idea that is supported with Weill's actions when Universal Edition wanted to

censor the words for the "Ballad of Immoral Earnings" by removing the lyrics entirely.

Weill insisted that the text remain because:

> The charm of the piece rests precisely in the fact that a rather risqué text (not, by
>
> the way as offensive as a lot of operetta texts) is set to music in a gentle, pleasant
>
> way. [143]

Therefore the music and the text are dependent upon one another. The lyrics added an

edge to a song composed in the style of a tango that would not have been pronounced

without them and the text is diffused of its offensiveness by a melody that makes them

seem harmless. This can be seen in the majority of Brecht's musical numbers,

especially the ones composed with Weill. It was common for edgy lyrics to be placed

with light accompaniment or vice versa as seen with such songs as "The Ballad of Mac

the Knife" and the songs in the wedding sequence of *The Threepenny Opera.*

This masking of a wolf in sheep's clothing is one of the main aspects that allowed

this progressive operetta to have such success. As David Drew astutely comments:

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[143] Hinton, S. "Misunderstanding 'The Threepenny Opera'" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S. (Cambridge: University Press) 188.

When Eisler remarked that the 'highly gifted' Weill never grasped what Brecht was aiming for, he should have added that the reverse was equally true...It was a collaboration that could have hardly survived long enough to produce a single work, let alone six in the space of three years, but for a high degree of self-deception and mutual incomprehension. [144]

Both Brecht and Weill shared some similar goals, in particular a desire to reinvent the theatre, but they had different views on how to attain this goal. Prior to Weill, Brecht wrote the majority of the music himself, but was limited by his musical abilities. His collaborative work, especially on *Mahagonny* was more than likely the starting point of Brecht's eventual turn away from intense musical collaboration. As Eric Bentley theorizes "The philosophy that Brecht worked out before he espoused Marxism in the late twenties was not totally negative". [145]   This illuminates the idea that Brecht's Epic Theatre developed in conjunction with his philosophical ideas. As Brecht became increasingly Marxist, his theories solidified.   This is reflected in the content of my three case studies. While *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* are political, they are really, at most, anti-capitalist or derogatory toward the upper-classes. *The Mother* on the other hand, is entirely political and solely preaches Communism.

Gilbert also theorizes that it was the writing and production process of *Mahagonny* that began to put doubts in Brecht's mind about the efficiency of opera and music as theatrical tools in regards to his own political and artistic standings. [146]   Brecht engaged in relentless arguments with Weill over the arrangements of the music and was

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[144] Gilbert, M. *Bertolt Brecht's Striving for Reason, even in music,* 53.
[145] Bentley, E. *The Brecht Commentaries,* (London: Methuen, 1981) 284.
[146] Gilbert, M. *Bertolt Brecht's Striving for Reason, even in music,* 70.

increasingly concerned that the heavy orchestra would muffle his lyrics. This would also affirm why *Mahagonny* was the last play that Brecht created on such a large musical scale. From these above statements it seems that *Mahagonny* was the turning point for Brecht with his theories, ideology and his relationship with Weill. This ultimately was reflected in the entire collection of Brecht's work over his lifetime. It seems as Brecht's repertoire matured, the composer's role became less integral, thus affecting the overall weight of the music in the Epic Theatre structure. Eisler was the last composer to achieve the *Mitarbeiter* (co-worker) title and from that point on Brecht only called in composers at the final moment to concentrate solely on the music.[147] Even Paul Dessau, who composed the majority of Brecht's later work, was never considered a collaborator. The degree to which the composer was integrated into the creative process lessened over the years. This could in part be due to the fact that Brecht's Epic theories progressed and solidified over time. Weill and Eisler were considered collaborators during the time when these Epic theories were developing. The two of them helped to create, put into practice and define key components of Epic Music. Once the theories were concrete, Brecht no longer needed a collaborator but needed a composer who could create music in such a way that it would fit into the finalised Epic structure. I believe the reason for this is because Brecht needed both Weill and Eisler to assist in creating and testing his Epic Music theories since Brecht's musical skills were minimal. But even though Brecht never collaborated with another composer in same way as with Weill and Eisler, the music was still essential to his

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[147] Kowalke, K. "Brecht and Music: theory and practice of theatre" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 247.

theatre. Brecht could have easily removed the music from his plays if he had wanted to, but the music always remained.

However, Brecht's writings are full of contradictions and vague concepts. One example of this can be seen with his 1935 statement that: "The most successful demonstration of the epic theatre was the production of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928". [148]   Brecht made this claim after the completion of his 1930 article on Epic Theatre, after *The Mother* was written and performed, after his intense shift to Marxism and after the huge success of the show. This declaration is contradictory to many of the other statements written by Brecht because of their condescending nature plagued with disapproval. For example, when asked in 1933 why *The Threepenny Opera* was so financially successful, Brecht answered: "I'm afraid it was everything that didn't matter to me: the romantic plot, the love story, the music". [149]   These two declarations contradict one another because of Brecht's clashing sentiments on Epic Music. Music is essential to the Epic Theatre framework and also to *The Threepenny Opera*. If Brecht stated that *The Threepenny Opera* was his best example of Epic Theatre, then surely he was referring to this as inclusive of all the elements of Epic Theatre.   However his second statement mentions that the music in *The Threepenny Opera* was unimportant to him. Therefore if the music in *The Threepenny Opera* did not operate as Epic Music by his standards, then it could not have been his best work of Epic Theatre. Or alternately, if *The Threepenny Opera* was his best example of Epic Theatre then the music had to have been an essential element of it. Another factor to consider is if the 1928

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[148] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 85.

[149] Kowalke, K. "Brecht and Music: theory and practice of theatre" *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds Thomson, P. & Sacks, G, 253.

production had been his most successful demonstration of the Epic Theatre then there should have been no need for him to drastically revise the script throughout his life. Furthermore, if *The Threepenny Opera* was his best example of Epic Theatre then it does not correspond with the fact that *The Mother* adheres closer to his Epic theories. Brecht's statement brings up a number of questions that seem to be unanswerable. This example is one of many that I have encountered during my research that highlights discrepancies within Brecht's own writings. It is important that one not only contextualizes Brecht's work within the progression of his Epic theories, but also considers that many of his theories or statements contradict each other. This leaves us, then, with a framework of theories that are not definitive, but take on different meanings and shapes throughout Brecht's life. Therefore each of Brecht's plays must be placed against the Epic framework which was outlined at its time of creation and not against the current model.

Another factor to consider when analysing the Epic Theatre structure is the unexpected success of Brecht and Weill's *The Threepenny Opera.* This factor is known as the "misunderstanding thesis" which I have already introduced in my chapter on *The Threepenny Opera.* The basic complication with this argument is that the majority of the theory is rooted in speculations of Brecht's intentions. As I have already explained, there was no solidified Epic theory prior to the creation of this play; therefore Brecht's intentions with Epic Theatre had not become clear by that point. Additionally, it seems that Brecht was the only one who felt that an apology needed to be made on behalf of *The Threepenny Opera's* success since Weill was more than happy with the monetary

gain and was quoted saying "I'm afraid that by underexploiting these popular numbers I may miss a good opportunity to assure my financial well-being for years to come". [150] Therefore it could be argued that financial success had come as a pleasant surprise, at least for Weill.

Aside from discussing the intent behind the operetta, there is mainly the concept of a misunderstanding on the audience's part. Kim Kowalke makes a strong argument when highlighting the fact that the only surviving version of *The Threepenny Opera* is the revised *Versuche* version which Brecht had changed to such an extent that the meters of his poetry were impossible to set with Weill's music. Since scholars have no access to the original text of *The Threepenny Opera* it is difficult to make assumptions about possible misunderstandings on the audience's behalf. To support this idea the writer Elias Canetti, a contemporary of Brecht and in Berlin at the time of *The Threepenny Opera* premiere, argues that:

> The audience understood it all too well. They may have been forced to confront on the stage their own unchristian, villainous traits. They were not repelled, however. They liked it. [151]

Canetti is attacking the claims fronted by Adorno and Ernst that the audience was not capable of understanding the operetta but only saw it as light entertainment. Canetti's statement, combined with the absence of the original text and my research supporting the idea that there was only a loose theoretical framework at the time of *The Threepenny*

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[150] Kowalke, K. "Accounting for Success: Misunderstanding Die Dreigroschenoper" *Opera Quarterly,* 6:3 (1989) 31.
[151] Hinton, S. "Misunderstanding 'The Threepenny Opera'" *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera,* ed Hinton, S, 190.

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Opera's premiere weakens the concept of the "misunderstanding thesis". I am not arguing that the "misunderstanding thesis" holds no weight, but I would stress that one cannot simply argue that the audience did not understand. It seems at this point that Brecht himself had only a loose grasp on his aims with Epic Theatre and some of the success could be attributed to unfinished or un-worked-out theories on Brecht's behalf and the discrepancies these caused.

Another theory behind the unexpected success of *The Threepenny Opera* comes to light in Joy Calico's book *Brecht and the Opera*. Calico argues that Brecht's Epic Theatre was not entirely dissimilar to the already existing operatic genre. One of Calico's examples includes Brecht's audience contract of "smoking and watching" which is similar to the behaviour adopted by the opera seria audience. [152] Brecht encouraged his audience to adopt a detached relationship from the play, but the opera seria audience had already embraced this behaviour in Italy in the 1700s. Therefore any opera written during this era was already formatted for a detached spectator relationship. Calico also argues that Brecht's anti-Aristotelian framework would have lost effectiveness on the opera stage since this operatic genre had few roots in Aristotle's theories. As Calico notes, the opera audience commonly encountered non-linear plots which rarely clung to the established conventions of the time. [153] I would argue that the similarities between the operatic genre and the Epic Theatre structure could also account for much of the acceptance and success of Brecht and Weill's

[152] There were two dominating opera styles in Italy in the 1700s, that of opera seria (dramatic or serious opera) and that of opera buffa (comedic opera). The opera seria audience went to the opera to eat, drink and talk and only diverted their attention to the stage when a well known singer was performing or a favourite aria was being delivered.

[153] Calico, J. *Brecht at the Opera,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008) 39-40.

creations, since the opera audience was used to encountering many aspects of Epic Theatre in Opera.   Michael Gilbert affirms this idea in his book, *Bertolt Brecht's striving for reason, even in music*, stating that these classic characteristics are hugely linked to the pre-romantic opera with its number format, separation of elements and combination of serious and popular music, thus emphasizing the antiquity of Brecht's self proclaimed innovative model. [154]   Although Brecht strove to reinvent the operatic stage, in reality he was unearthing historic conventions of the genre for use in his Epic Theatre, which could explain why this seemingly subversive operetta was embraced by the theatre audiences of its time.

My research draws me to conclude that the "misunderstanding thesis" may not be as concrete as its supporters make it out to be. Firstly, it is almost impossible to determine the progression which had been made in 1928 in Brecht's Epic Theatre theories; certainly, it seems from his writing they had not been finalized until after *The Threepenny Opera* premiered.   Also, the original script has been lost and all that remains is the heavily revised "Versuche" version that does not fit rhythmically with Weill's compositions.   Therefore the "misunderstanding thesis" is weakened and cannot be looked at as simplistically as scholars to date have argued.

Although my three case studies can be placed against the Epic Theatre format with only minor discrepancies, my research has made me questions key components of the theory as a whole.   As I have explored throughout my paper, the concept of *gestus* was never clarified by Brecht or any of his composers, but one thing was apparent:

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[154] Gilbert, M. *Bertolt Brecht's Striving for Reason, even in music,* 257.

Brecht viewed a strong connection between music and *gestus*. The inherent problem lies not only with the convoluted definition of the word, but also with the fact that Brecht did not indicate what *gestus* should accompany any given song. This creates an inherent problem for the execution of the music in Epic Theatre. Previously Brecht relied on his own power as the director to ensure that the proper *gestus* was used, but with him gone it seems that there is no security behind the term and its application today. As I discussed in my chapter on *The Mother,* Brecht expressed in his review of the New York production that if the proper *gestus* was not utilized then the music would fail in its purpose. In an article on music in the Epic Theatre he again stressed that:

If the actors do not start by getting hold of the right gest then there is little hope that they will be able to carry out their task of stimulating a particular approach in the spectator. Our working-class theatres need careful education and strict training if they are to master the tasks proposed here and the possibilities which are here offered to them. [155]

So in essence, Brecht maintains that an actor must have guidance in order even to approach the application of the correct *gestus*. The concern falls with the fact that Brecht is no longer able to oversee this aforementioned education and has left behind no clear guidelines as to how this education should be instructed. It is possible that Brecht left oral instructions with his company, the Berliner Ensemble, but this is unconfirmed and words can easily be lost, misinterpreted, or forgotten. Therefore it could be argued that Brecht's Epic Music is currently restricted because of his failure to provide instructions for accurate execution.

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[155] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre,* 88.

A second primary component of Epic Theatre that I would like to call into question involves the idea of a separation between the elements. In regards to music this includes a separation of the song from the plot, a separation between the character and the actor singing the song, a separation between the text and the music, and a separation of instrument from instrument. However, one must question how there can be a true separation of the elements when all elements function in conjunction with one another to create a theatrical piece. It seems impossible for there to be a complete separation from the vocal line and the accompaniment following it. Even if the singer was to sing against the music and create his or her own melody there would still be a joining between the vocal line and accompaniment simply because the two were happening simultaneously. Not to mention, from a musical perspective, it would have been pointless for either Weill or Eisler to compose a melody in the first place if the singer were meant to disregard it entirely. The composers could have chosen to use "x's" at the head of each note to indicate that the melody was to be disregarded or undefined. However, "x's" were only used in the sheet music when the characters were meant to speak the passage. So musically, the practice of writing a melody only to have it sung against defeats the purpose of writing out the melody in the first place and would still not help to create a complete separation between the vocal line and the accompaniment.

The same would hold true with a separation between song and character. Even if the actor were to step completely out of his or her character for the execution of the song, there would still be the inevitable link between character and song because the

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actor would continuously be associated with the character even if he or she were not playing his or her character at that moment. In order to have a true separation of the songs from the play, in theory the songs should be able to stand on their own outside of the text of the play and vice versa. It is extremely difficult to do this with any of Brecht's plays and impossible to do with any of my three case studies without drastically changing the entire structure of the play. Therefore, music is essential to Brecht's Epic Theatre and furthermore the music cannot be separated from the text. I would argue that Brecht was striving for more of a loosening between the elements instead of a separation. Although he has not explicitly stated this in his theories, it appears that through practice he does not create a complete separation of the elements. The elements in Epic Theatre do, however, have a far greater separation than that of Dramatic Theatre. So even with Brecht's conventions of "song lighting", actor/character/song separation and alienation, he is not able to keep the elements completely separate from one another. But these conventions do push the elements apart and help to disallow the culinary effect.

A third aspect of Brecht's Epic Theatre theories that I have found fault with, pertains to the idea of allowing the spectator to formulate his or her own thoughts or ideas. Although Brecht aimed to allow his spectators to think for themselves, in reality, much of Brecht's theories focused on the concept of controlling a particular reaction from the audience. For example, Brecht stated that:

It is perfectly true that the theatre would benefit greatly if musicians were able to produce music which would have a more or less exactly foreseeable effect on the spectator. [156]

      This statement reinforces the idea that Brecht wanted control over how his audience responded to his music and theatre. Even though he was aware that in reality it was difficult or even impossible, this still did not stop him from engaging with the idea in his theatre. In essence the act of encouraging the spectator to think for themselves is a form of control. In Brecht's theatre a spectator was condemned for engaging with an emotion instead of using his or her own reason. But if the spectator used reason to deduce that the most appropriate response to the situation was to emote feeling, this would be equally condemned. Therefore, this form of control is no more freeing than what Brecht claimed the Dramatic Theatre demanded of its audience. In both Dramatic and Epic Theatre there is still a demand placed on the spectator. On several occasions Brecht condemned the Dramatic Theatre for using music in such a way as to elicit a certain emotional reaction from the audience, but judging from the above statement Brecht wished it were possible to evoke a specified reaction from the audience in his theatre. Brecht's theories on the spectator's reactions were derived primarily from his disgust at the way Dramatic Theatre used conventions which manipulated its audience into feeling an experience. But on closer examination of his theories, it becomes apparent that Brecht was equally as manipulative - he was just aiming to manipulate for a different outcome.

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[156] Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, 90.

Therefore, the above flaws must be considered when analyzing the musical components of the Epic Theatre structure. The lack of clarity behind the word *gestus* is problematic because it is a primary component to both Epic Music and Epic Theatre. The absence of a clear definition makes it difficult not only to analyse in respect to its role in music, but makes it almost impossible to put into practice effectively. Also the concept of a separation of the elements can only be pushed so far and, as I discussed, there can never be a true separation of the elements, not even in Brecht's theatre. Additionally, the idea of a free-thinking audience under the guise of Brecht's control begs a theatre of masked intentions. [157]

My research has assisted in unpicking the complex workings of Epic Music and has shown that Brecht's Epic theories were developed over a period of time and were not solidified prior to 1930. Current printings and translations of Brecht's theories cannot be placed against his plays written before 1930 with complete accuracy. Since these theories were developed and not static it is difficult to determine the exact role music played in his pre-1930 plays. Therefore each play can only be contextualized in its respective place within the development of Epic Theatre and no singular role of Epic

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[157] Since the 1960s scholars have brought into light many of Epic Theatre's faults and failings. This questioning has developed into a movement termed post-Brechtian. Post-Brechtian theatre recognizes the limitations of Dramatic Theatre, such as its use of an emotional catharsis and naturalistic acting paired with an un-naturalistic environment; however it also acknowledges the fact that Epic Theatre is plagued with its own set of limitations. Many of these limitations and unanswered questions refer directly to what I have been discussing in this conclusion, specifically the idea of audience control as well as the use of a non-narrative theatre. Lehmann, H. *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006) 32-35.

Music can be determined. However, even though my three cases studies adhere in parts to the Epic Music framework, I would argue that this framework is not feasible as a theatrical device. This is due to the faults I have uncovered such as the undefined *gestus,* the idea that the elements of theatre cannot be truly separated and the fact that audience control cannot be completely attained.   Brecht on several occasions stressed the importance of these three elements in achieving his Epic Theatre, but if these three elements are unattainable or un-clarified, then Epic Music cannot be an achievable theatrical device under Brecht's format. Therefore, it is not a difficult task for music to fulfil the demands of an Epic Theatre, it is an impossible one.

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