

**Article title**

‘Next you’re Franklin Shepard Inc.?’ Composing the Broadway musical, a study of Kurt Weill’s working practices

**Abstract:**

This article contextualises the working processes of musical theatre composers, revealing their work to be profoundly immersed in collaborative practices. Several recent publications have destabilised the authority of the author figure, by addressing the practicalities of referring to Broadway musicals as the work of one or two creative figures: Dominic McHugh’s recent exploration of the work that post-Second World War Broadway musical theatre composers do reveals a network of interactions between the composers and amanuenses, orchestrators, and vocal arrangers. (2015) Even within this framework Weill is seen to be unlike other Broadway composers, since he does much of this work himself. This article proposes that the term ‘Broadway composer’ is unhelpful in fully understanding what Weill and others like him actually do, beyond putting notes on a page. The article lays out Weill’s actual working practices; collaboration in proposing new projects, the pre-production and rehearsal process, utilising music after publication across different mediums, and his careful management of his own public reputation. Having done this, it calls for McHugh’s paradigm to be extended much further in order to acknowledge what composition in Broadway musical theatre involves – writing Broadway musicals means necessarily being a composer-as-collaborator.

**Keywords:** composing, Kurt Weill, musical theatre, Broadway musicals, collaborative practice

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# **‘Next you’re Franklin Shepard Inc.?’ Composing the Broadway musical, a study of Kurt Weill’s working practices**

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## **Introduction**

If musicals are the most collaborative and conventionalized of theatrical forms, what is the value of a theory of authorship? Does it suffice to describe *Lady in the Dark* (1941) as a Kurt Weill musical? Or as a Kurt Weill – Ira Gershwin – Moss Hart – Gertrude Lawrence musical?

(Savran 2004: 214)

If the literary author is long dead (at the hands of Barthes) then the prognosis for the author of the Broadway musical does not look so good (Barthes 1977: 142-148). In recent years a number of challenges have been made to the dominant understanding that the musical is written by one or two named authors, wherein a traditional pecking order has gone composer – lyricist – (possibly) book writer – director – choreographer. In this ideology, some – occasionally all – of these people are credited with writing a musical that then exists as a finished and closed text. Subsequent production processes may unleash the ‘creative genius’ locked inside the written text and music notation, through the attempt to stage a so-called ‘authentic’ production. This version of the musical-as-textual-record rather than musical-as-performance-event has been rebuffed several times: Bruce Kirle’s work reopens the musical’s text to include the contribution of the performer (2005); Millie Taylor considers the role of the audience (2012); Elizabeth Wells argues musical theatre scholarship should strike a balance between addressing the ‘composer as artist and composer as businessman’ (2010). There are a number of approaches which do this by uncovering the quotidian side of collaboration either for individual authors or in ‘biographies’ of the individual shows

*Oklahoma* (1943) and *Lady in the Dark* (1941) (Carter 2007; mcclung 2007), and in my own thesis on Kurt Weill (Whitfield 2011).

These kinds of approaches to musical theatre destabilise the authority of the author figure (whether of words or score), echoing earlier work in the field of contemporary performance and live art. Therein, Susan Melrose terms such shortcuts ‘signature practices,’ arguing that they serve only to ‘reproduce a widely-evidenced *misrecognition* of collaborative professional practice’ (2006: 124). When the Broadway musical’s working processes are revealed, they expose a similar ‘misrecognition,’ which masks a complex collaborative process in which it is extremely difficult to tell where any one person’s authorship begins and ends. Dominic McHugh’s recent exploration of the work done by post-Second World War Broadway composers reveals a network of interactions between the composers and amanuenses, orchestrators, and vocal arrangers. McHugh reveals the actual working practices of the period, demonstrating that ‘their texts evolved through creative processes leading to performance events, rather than having been conceived as fixed “works” emanating from a single authority’ (2015: 606). He concludes that there is a need to ‘redefine the way we think about [composers’] roles historically’, perhaps referring to them as “composer-collaborators” rather than “composer” (2015: 648). Notably, he singles out Weill’s work as somewhat less collaborative since he involved fewer people in the process of writing the music for the musicals that he worked on: Weill ‘fully orchestrated a great deal of his theatre music’ (2015: 608). He is not alone in noting the exceptional nature of this practice; Mark Grant notes that as well as composing the tunes:

Weill composed [...] all the incidental material normally supplied by arrangers and orchestrators, including underscoring, scene changes, and ballets; was entirely his own vocal arranger (another function almost always farmed out. [...]); orchestrated virtually everything himself; and single-handedly re-orchestrated every transposition

necessitated by rehearsal changes. [...] Nobody else has anybody done all that for fourteen straight years and eight musicals on Broadway.

(Grant 2009: 15)

McHugh notes that while signature practices inaccurately represent the creative processes through which musicals are written, they have another kind of use: ‘labels such as “the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals” have a taxonomical value that transcends the mechanical process of writing down the music’ (McHugh 2015: 648). What McHugh calls the composer’s ‘authorial control’ has signified Kurt Weill’s origins as a classical composer, and communicated the particular cultural value of Weill’s status as a ‘proper’ composer. Although McHugh is necessarily more concerned with revealing historic working practices than querying what the impact of Weill’s unusual status is (or why it may exist), I want to build on his findings by considering them in the context of Susan Melrose’s work and, in particular, her use of Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital in understanding why some labours are mystified over others (Bourdieu 2010). Melrose has suggested that signature practices are not just a particular facet of any one work that could be seen from one piece to another: ‘It signals not simply intellectual property ownership; but what is recognised as signature involves a relational mark, established between “the work”, its maker/s, and its validation by those whose judgements of taste and value are vital to the disciplines concerned’ (Melrose 2007). Indeed the assumption that Weill’s music is *his own* is a helpful remedy to those who have historically sought to dismiss his work on Broadway because of the form’s collaborative nature. The founder of much of the field of Weill research, David Drew, saw this stylistic feature as a pernicious influence on the composer’s output, each musical he suggests:

[...] reflects a long process of collective criticism and amendment which involved the entire production team, together with the financial backers, the publishers and song pluggers, and finally the public itself. Once aesthetic criteria had been subordinated, no musical idea, however inspired, was defensible for its own sake if it could be shown to conflict with any of the collective interests of the team.

(Drew 1980: 308)

Based on his own findings, McHugh places Kurt Weill at the composer end, rather than the composer-collaborator end of his paradigm (McHugh 2015: 608). But writing music is only a small aspect of what the musical theatre composer does, albeit the one that we have been most interested in historically – the art of making music. Contextualising the working processes of musical theatre composers, even Weill's, reveals composers to be profoundly immersed in collaboration.

The process of making art has been demystified on a number of occasions, primarily by sociologists exploring collaborative networks. Janet Wolff's radical revision of the way composition is understood locates the artist at the centre of a necessarily cooperative and collaborative world – something which Broadway musical theatre explicitly reveals. Wolff finds the emergence of the mythologised artist in the late Romantic period, at the end of patronage as the primary model of artistic sponsorship: 'the actual situation of the artist/author from the mid-nineteenth century helped to produce the myth that art is an activity which transcends the social' (Wolff 1981: 3). Wolff proposes replacing 'the traditional notion of the artist as creator with one of the artist as producer' (Wolff 1981: 136). She dismisses the notion of 'artistic activity as a uniquely different kind of work' from any other kind of activity (Wolff 1981: 17). In shifting the primary focus in creative production away from the named author/artist, Wolff reveals that art works as inherently collaborative

and require many agents in their production and reception. She includes audiences, who: ‘play an active and participatory role in creating the finished product’ (Wolff 1981: 50). Importantly, she addresses how assumptions based on the lone genius have gendered the composer, explaining that ‘critical practice, in literature and indeed in all the arts, has consistently undermined, neutralized and dismissed work by women’ (Wolff 1981: 6). Howard Becker builds on these concepts by suggesting that art work is not inherently different to other kinds of labour, since it relies on ‘the joint activity’ of many people, what he calls an ‘art world’: ‘Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation’ (Becker 1982: 1). Becker’s approach produces ‘an understanding of the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art happens, of the way art happens.’ (Becker 1982: 1)

In contrast to this picture of collaborative effort, the lone genius-creator model has been used in Broadway musical theatre to raise the perceived aesthetic value of its musical output. Wells considers the stakes of Broadway composers sending music out to be orchestrated, stating it ‘might demote many of these composers in the eyes of specialists in art music for whom orchestration (including texture, figuration, etc.) is one of the defining features of a “real” composer.’ (Wells 2010: 163) Drew’s detailed assessment of the process of writing musicals, quoted above, is an accurate description of the kinds of interactions Weill was involved in as a result of his participation in brazen commerciality. To participate in Broadway musicals as a composer is to explicitly embrace collaboration in a form where the singular work or text can only ever be a limited representation of part of the whole of the performance event. In this article, I intend to demonstrate that this categorisation of Weill as the most ‘composer-like’ musical theatre composer is based on a limited understanding by laying out Weill’s actual working practices. Having done this, I will call for McHugh’s

paradigm to be extended much further in order to acknowledge what composition in Broadway musical theatre involves.

### **The ‘work processes’ of collaboration and utilization (Adorno 1976: 192)**

Aligning Kurt Weill’s career with traditional concepts of what a composer does is by no means a new issue; he fulfils many of the expectations of a ‘proper’ composer in terms of training and pedigree but then problematically ends up writing eight Broadway musicals, an activity which has been hard to excuse for many. Born in Dessau in 1900, Weill had a ‘proper’ education in composition from figures like Engelbert Humperdinck (1918) and Ferruccio Busoni (1921-1923). More problematically for his survival in 1930s Germany, Weill was Jewish and a socialist troublemaker, who was damned by the Nazis as an *Entartete* composer, a socially-disruptive degenerate. Weill had turned away from symphonic music in his early twenties to composing for the theatre, most famously writing *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) with Bertolt Brecht. Increasingly aware of the danger of remaining in Germany, Weill left for Paris in 1933, eventually arriving in New York in 1935, where he remained until his untimely death in 1950. Weill wrote primarily for Broadway (most notably with Ira Gershwin, Maxwell Anderson and Moss Hart). He composed popular songs, war propaganda and film scores, but writing musicals confirmed his cultural delinquency in the eyes of the modernists who had once counted him as one of their own.

Unsurprisingly then, when he died, his obituaries reflected this concern over the aesthetic repercussions of Weill’s shift from German opera to Broadway musicals. T.W. Adorno, true to form, argued in his article for the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, that Weill could hardly be considered a composer at all (Adorno 1950: n.p.). Adorno suggests that Weill’s poor choices as a composer closed the door on the potential of the work he not only could have written, but *should* have written. Adorno concludes that Weill would be better described as

*Musikregisseur* (Sams' translation proposes 'a theatre director who used music as his medium'), because of his artistic turpitude (Adorno [1950] 2008). Kim Kowalke suggests that in betraying appropriate standards of behaviour, Weill clarifies what those standards actually were: 'Weill had renounced the values Adorno considered to be absolute: subjective expression's exclusive claim to authenticity, the historical necessity of atonality, and the existence of objective, integral laws of musical structure' (Kowalke 1985: 29). Adorno later expanded on Weill's working practices as one of a course of radio lectures broadcast between 1961-1962 in Frankfurt (Adorno, 1975: 9) called 'Moderne' or 'Avant-Garde', later published as part of a collection.. Adorno suggests that there is a type of music which stands outside the two branches of 'high art and entertainment', 'a species derived from stage music and dramatic interludes, a kind of music that fulfils its function in contexts other than musical' (Adorno 1976: 192). Within this 'species' of music, the 'new type of composer [...] combines the work processes of composition, performance and utilization. One might talk of "manager composers"' (Adorno 1976: 192).

Adorno's response to Weill has been much discussed: nowhere more thoroughly than in Stephen Hinton's recent study, in which he argues that the 'epithet *Musikregisseur* reduced the composer to his role as a cog in the larger machinery of theatrical life' (Hinton 2012: 13). He argues that 'the "new type" proposed by Adorno [...] is essentially a negative concept, reflecting an inability on Weill's part to qualify as a "real composer"' (Hinton 2012: 15). Hinton counter-proposes a way to understand Weill by identifying stylistic unity in each individual work, finding '[their] "signature"' and revealing 'what makes Weill Weill' (Hinton 2012: 33). Intriguingly, Adorno's obituary concedes that something recognisable in Weill's music (Broadway or not) still 'brought you up short when you turned the radio on' (Adorno [1950] 2008). The Weill-ness of Weill's music, while important for considerations of aesthetics, is not what I am concerned with here. Instead, I want to suggest that Adorno's

description of the ‘work processes of composition, performance and utilization’ might in fact be a very useful framework for considering the musical theatre composer (Adorno 1976: 192).

### **Collaboration**

Weill was unashamedly clear about the labour of writing music, something which was noted elsewhere. The obituary Virgil Thomson wrote for Weill eulogises Weill as a ‘workman’ (Thomson [1950] 2000: 273) and this is borne out across many of Weill’s private letters and public interviews. As Howard Becker explains, actually working threatens the ‘notion of spontaneous expression or sublime inspiration’, and ‘creat[es] some doubt as to whether [the artist] can be exercising superhuman talents’ (Becker 2008: 18). In this letter to his parents, Weill complains: ‘I had to make all the decisions myself, [...] and had to collaborate on the libretto, the casting, scenic designs and the entire organization of a big Broadway show as well. During the seven weeks before opening, I never slept more than 2-3 hours a night’ (quoted in Hirsch 2002: 233). Although this might be somewhat overstating the case, there are other examples:

“It is the orchestration I worry about [...] I cannot do it before rehearsals begin because I have to hear the singers’ voices and also work with the choreographer. It means I am at rehearsal all day long and must work on the orchestration at night. I get no sleep...”

“Don’t feel sorry for him”, his wife admonished. “He loves every minute of it. After opening night he always says, ‘Now I am going to have a good rest.’ The rest lasts exactly two days. Then he says, ‘NOW what am I going to do?’”

(Braggiotti [1949] 2016)

Weill's description echoes the braggadocio of other composers; Irving Berlin was quoted as saying 'I do most of my work under pressure. When I have a song to write I go home at night, and after dinner about 8 I begin work. Sometimes I keep at it till 4 or 5 in the morning' (Anon. 1916: 119). Composing for musicals is a laborious business.

Weill sees collaboration as entirely necessary for his work. Producer Cheryl Crawford, trying to encourage progress in the early months of what would become *Johnny Johnson*, wrote that Weill 'believes that the script can be done in four or five weeks of steady collaborative work' (Crawford 1936). Weill noted Crawford's own contribution to the project, she 'is terrific, and it's astonishing how much she understands' (Weill [1936] 1996a: 194). When away working on the West Coast he wrote to reassure her: 'Don't worry, Hollywood will not get me,' having already told her that 'I miss you very much. I have the feeling, you speak my language, you understand [*sic.*] me without saying – and that is something very seldom' (Weill 1937). It is important here to note Elizabeth Wells' caution that, 'one of the primary and perhaps distinctive traits of musical theatre is that the collaborative process is often so fraught with competing demands that each collaborator's account leads away from any sense of consensus, not toward it' (Wells 2010: 165). Yet the muddled picture of the collaborative process itself reveals the composer caught in multiple kinds of interactions with multiple kinds of creative producers, often simultaneously for concurrent projects.

### **Developing New Projects**

This complex network of production is perhaps best seen in the perplexing records of periods in which Weill attempted to get new musicals going, and when chronologies are difficult to follow. One never-completed project was the so-called 'Opera from Mannheim.' In a letter to Lenya, written on 28 March 1937, he described it in detail:

We worked out a wonderful plot, and all three of us are very enthusiastic: a play about the refugees. It starts in the Mannheim Opera during an opera rehearsal, which suddenly is interrupted by a Nazi who fires everyone because they are non-Aryans. They all immigrate to New York, and we will show their adventures there, with a lot of humour, of course, but, for example there's also a scene in which they receive a letter from one of their friends in Mannheim who is no longer alive when the letter arrives.

(Weill [1937] 1996b: 225)

The idea for the end of the opera involved the company being able to return home and deciding not to, performing their opera in a 'little movie theatre' in small-town America. This would have been the only time that Weill directly addressed his own experience. The two other collaborators that he mentions were Bella and Sam Spewack, who were going to be joined by Yip Harburg, who would later remember the piece rather differently. He vaguely recalled working on a piece about a 'Jewish theatrical troupe' (quoted in Sanders 1980: 244). The improbability of a Broadway musical about refugees was not immediately obvious to Weill: even three years after arriving in New York, he was still suggesting to the Spewacks that 'the theme of our show is just right for Broadway at this moment [...] I am sure that everybody is waiting for this kind of a show' (Weill 1938). The many parallel letters during this period between Weill and Paul Green reflect his keenness to begin many theatrical projects, and his sheer persistence in doing so (indeed many examples of these letters survive in Weill Lenya Research Center (WLRC)'s collections).

Weill's close involvement with casting decisions as part of the production process further illustrates the complexity of collaborative production processes. For the *Mannheim* project, Weill was keen to shape potential casting decisions to ensure the viability of the project (and

presumably financial investment too). He suggests Burgess Meredith, who starred in the ill-fated *Johnny Johnson*: ‘With him in the leading part and good singers in the other parts, it could be just the right mixture of play and musical comedy which it should be. What do you think?’ (Weill 1938) The complex process of finding the right, marketable, performer and then having to work with them is perhaps best illustrated in Bruce McClung’s discussion of the dramaturgical shaping of *Lady in the Dark* around its star, Gertrude Lawrence, and her famed indecision – the key character trait of its protagonist (McClung 2001: 4-6). Weill once wrote that casting ‘like everything in the theatre [was] the result of hard work;’ when discussing *Street Scene*, he credited the work of Lina Abarbanell, the casting director, Maurice Abravanel, the conductor, and his own contribution (Weill [1947] 2016a). Poor casting decisions might sink a show, as in the case of *Firebrand of Florence*, when the decision to choose a slightly cheaper Duke to the one that Weill preferred, or to hire Lenya for the Duchess, certainly did not help an already troubled project. Galand relates the sorry saga, explaining that when the show closed, Weill concluded it was ‘killed by production’ (quoted in Galand 1999: 27).

Tracking how Weill was paid, or even whether he was paid at all, for his involvement in projects is difficult, especially for the early works. Anecdotally there appears to be some element of compromise over costs if it would get the show running; Cheryl Crawford records in her biography that the budget for *Johnny* was small, so ‘fortunately, Kurt did his own orchestrations, which saved money’ (Crawford 1977: 94). That money did enter the equation should hardly be surprising, producing a musical has always been a large financial undertaking. In a letter, Weill insisted he had always done the orchestrations whether for musicals or for operas: ‘I consider this a part of the composer’s job on a show, and I have always made my financial arrangements accordingly.’ (Weill 1942) Irving Berlin established his own music corporation early in his career in order ‘to publish his works and retain control

over all the copyrights, which he guarded fiercely.’ (Berger [1989] 2016) Berlin took a financial interest in the Music Box theatre, something which he maintained throughout his life. Similarly, Weill became a member of the Playwrights’ Company, in order to manage his own productions, which became a major financial concern.

The business of being a musical theatre composer, most famously parodied in Stephen Sondheim’s ‘Franklin Shepard Inc.’ (Sondheim 1986), is an unavoidable part of what the composer actually does. Weill enjoyed having money, after the success of *Lady in the Dark* he wrote to his collaborator Ira Gershwin that, ‘The show is doing wonderful business (as you know from your statements).’ (Weill 1941b) Weill stoically reports the attacks he was getting for writing musicals from serious music critics, ending the letter with the news that, ‘We bought a Buick Convertible today and it seems pretty sure now that we will buy the house we told you about’ (Weill 1941b). Throughout his career, Weill was keenly aware of the added value that his reputation brought: in this earlier letter from Hollywood to Lenya, he explains that his agent suggested MGM might offer him a one-year contract at \$600 a week, which ‘of course, is not a good salary,’ but the ‘position here would be totally different if I had a real success’ with a musical back in New York (Weill [1937] 1996c: 228).

The idea that composers may make decisions about their art based on money is problematic to the ideology of autonomy, which requires the composer’s so-called genius to be unblemished by earthly dealings. Weill’s explicit participation with the financial machinations of Broadway threatened his chances of being included in the Western canon of great composers. David Drew places the blame for Weill’s rejection from this pantheon down to his suspicion that ‘no composer who devoted the last years of his life to writing Broadway shows deserved, or could even have wished, to be taken seriously’ (Drew 1980: 302). Virgil Thomson noted after Weill’s early death that now Weill’s ‘commercial career is over [...] his purer music can shine’ (Thomson [1950] 2000: 273). The ideology around the

artist is perhaps most comprehensively demystified by Raymond Williams, who describes this abstraction of artistic activity as ‘its promotion or relegation to an area of special experience’ (Williams 1961: 39). The processes of making collaborative theatre music reveal the abstraction; they expose the sleight-of-hand which gives the composer named authorship to be a by-product of the masking of the capitalist system of music production. The need to maintain the façade of composition as ‘pure art’ has attributed special qualities to the artist and placed particular restraints on what ‘true artists’ can be seen to do. I am not saying that composing Broadway musicals is not artistic activity, but that this art takes place through collaborative networks that are usually constructed with the express purpose of making a profit.

### **Utilization of music through publishing and recordings**

The process of writing theatre music explicitly reveals multiple iterations of compositions; composition does not end at the first rehearsal, it is iterative in response to workshops, casting decisions, rehearsals, out-of-town try-outs, and Broadway previews before being more stable as a repeated performance text after the point of opening night. Revivals can reopen this process again. Steven Suskin’s extraordinary recovery of orchestration practices notes the financial implications of the working process of making Broadway musicals, even to the extent of noting the charges for copyists (paid by the line) when new songs were added overnight during try-outs ‘with everyone getting double-time at out-of-town rates’ (Suskin 2011: 17). Though the pace of change calmed after opening night, shows could be changed again for recasting or for tours or revivals. All of these changes might be prompted by audience responses – if a number has a strong impact on an audience, or falls flat. The uniquely dynamic composition process of the Broadway musical prolongs composition from writing for one event as the ‘work’ is repeatedly performed over a long duration, in multiple

spaces of performance. The event is the result of multiple work processes all of which require revisions and shifts in the score. The surviving musical record of that collaboration, the score, usually fails to attain the stability that is required in the ‘genuine composer’ narrative (except where they have been constructed *ex post facto*, as in the exemplary scholarly work that has gone into the Kurt Weill Edition). Multiple rehearsal scores may exist (only some of these may be preserved in archives) – scores which were not intended to be perfect representations of the artist’s intentions, but to be a working score from which to run a show.

From this score, certain potential hit songs might be chosen for individual recordings, primarily for radio broadcast. This was the case with ‘The Saga of Jenny’ from *Lady in the Dark*, which Weill explained to Ira Gershwin, ‘doesn’t seem to do too good. Some small radio stations who wanted to broadcast the record, couldn’t do it because of the word “Gin” and the husband who wasn’t hers’ (Weill 1941a). As technology developed during the 1940s, recordings of larger sections of musicals became possible. By *Street Scene* (1947), Columbia Records were able to release ‘an album of six twelve-inch records. This made it possible to show [...] about fifty minutes of music’ (Weill [1947] 2016a). Weill had embraced recording technology throughout his career: the 1939 World’s Fair pageant ‘*Railroads on Parade*’ which, in order to compete with real steam trains on stage, had ‘100 costumed performers who pretended to sing, while the actual singers and musicians belted out the numbers into microphones in a sound studio under the stage’ (Leland 2012). Some of this music was recorded on to 78rpm acetates, but these were not commercially released (presumably because this was not financially viable). Weill’s ability to switch between multiple kinds of dissemination of his music reflects his engagement with the circumstances within which he was working.

Weill’s ability to diversify is clear in his belief that his music could and should be used for both serious purposes and for popular entertainment; many of his letters to his publishers

reflect his exasperation that this was not happening. Weill consistently positions his work as a commodity to be exploited for both financial and cultural capital: ‘I never could see any reason why the “educated” (not to say “serious”) composer should not be able to reach all available markets with his music’ (Weill [1947] 2016c). His early experience with the lack of success of *Johnny Johnson* (1937) perplexed him: in citing the possible differences between the ‘American and European music business’, Weill adds, ‘I’ll be glad if you could explain it to me’ (Weill [1936] 2000: 169). He was furious that the music had not been widely circulated: ‘a young band leader, whom I know, called up Chappell on Friday asked for the *Johnny Johnson* music. He got the answer: “We are not pushing the show, but we have a couple of other hits, why don’t you play those?”’ (Weill [1936] 2000: 169). After the success of *Lady in the Dark*, Weill writes to Dreyfus about *One Touch of Venus*: ‘I am absolutely convinced [there are] some very potential hit numbers [...], and since you would like to have hit songs as much as I do, I cannot see any reason why we shouldn’t at least try’ (Weill 1943). It is fair to say that Dreyfus received many such letters; here Weill writes again about another show:

There is nobody at Chappell’s who could concentrate on the exploitation of the rich standard values in a score like “Street Scene” [...] Believe me, I would never have become mixed up with song plugging in connection with the work of the musical importance of “Street Scene” if Chappell’s would have been in a position to offer me the kind of exploitation which I had expected for a work of this type. So I find myself in a position where neither the popular nor the standard values of my score are being properly exploited.

(Weill 1947a)

Six months later, Weill has made a decision to take his music elsewhere. His serious music calls for ‘an English production (Covent Garden) and performances in European opera houses’ (Weill 1947b). As far as Weill is concerned, this is something Chappell’s are unable to provide: one can only assume some relief on their part.

### **Presentation of self**

Weill’s connection to the U.S. and the ideology of ‘being American’ often seems interwoven with desire to write successful Broadway musicals. His love of the U.S is sincere, there is nothing that points to any kind of ‘script’ or a ‘mask for suppressed convictions or genuine self’ as Kowalke explains: ‘If his American identity was only a role, Weill played it so convincingly that it became his only reality. If it was self-deception, it was total’ (Kowalke 2000: 124). Since remaining in Germany risked certain imprisonment if not death, the U.S. offered him a liberty to work and build another life after the tremendous personal loss that came with his exile. Weill clearly felt that writing himself into an American cultural identity was essential for his chances for survival on Broadway. He certainly drastically reimagined earlier work for American consumption, to create a narrative in which he had always been headed for the United States. Soon after his arrival he discussed *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1927) describing it as an operetta and a ‘romantic conception of romantic America’ (Gilbert [1935] 2016). This was a fairly astounding public relations move, since the opera presents a version of an American city that revolves around money, gluttony, lust and drunkenness; where the worst crime is poverty, and a man is put to death for bankruptcy. Hans Gutman described the first performance of the opera in his *Modern Music* review: it ‘ended in a disturbance such as I have never seen surpassed. [...] the evening just escaped closing with a fist fight’ (Gutman 1930: 33). Weill’s interview ran under the headline: ‘German Refugee [*sic.*] Discovers Romantic America Lives up to Operetta He Wrote, Sight Unseen in 1927’ (Gilbert [1935] 2016). Weill consciously shapes his reputation and was good at doing so – the interviewer praises his sincerity: ‘his English is good, and the quotes aren’t phony’ (Gilbert [1935] 2016). Weill would again remark that *Mahagonny*’s ‘description of this country was quite accurate in many ways’, in one of his most openly patriotic

interviews (Weill [1941] 2016b). The myriad of public relations material Weill engaged in during his American career reflects an awareness of his own reputation and the impact of that on his current and future projects. He seems keenly aware that to be a successful Broadway composer, he must be seen to be a successful American composer.

It is difficult to differentiate aspects of what Weill does from what one might assume was the task of the producers: he may not invest his own money but he does bring a particular cultural capital, his name and reputation (to use Melrose's term, his signature), to the proceedings. His investment in productions was not only in writing music, but also in investing his own reputation; in one letter to *Life* magazine, Weill wrote a list of his recent works referencing his fairly recent (1945) major flop and acknowledging his feelings about the matter, '*Firebrand of Florence* (ouch!)' (Weill [1947] 2016c). For Weill, the work processes of performance and utilization are entwined. He carefully attempts to control the dissemination of his music across various mediums and multiple markets, promoting his music for maximum financial gains *and* maximum cultural capital. Weill manages his own reputation and cultural capital in the press. This element of the production process, the 'not-composing' part, is just as essential to his working life as the 'composing part.' Susan Melrose asks in response to her position, 'what might be the implications [...] of the premise that *established ways of knowing condemn us to inadequate ideas?*' (emphasis in original Melrose 2007). Broadway musical theatre composition is inherently collaborative, as indeed is all art. Janet Wolff's description of the 'artist as producer,' (Wolff 1981: 136) is particularly helpful: to work within musical theatre is to embark on an essentially collaborative process. To write a Broadway musical is to necessarily be a composer-as-collaborator.

## References

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The obituary Adorno wrote after Weill's death was published in a German newspaper, a copy of it is held in the WLRC under the folder 'Kurt Weill Biography – Germany'. Hinton (2012) cites a reprint

of the obituary in Adorno, T.W (1984), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 18:544-477. In this article I have used a personal copy of an unpublished translation by Jeremy Sams.

A number of the sources below have been digitised and made available via the Kurt Weill Foundation's website; where this is the case those details have been indicated. As a result some original page numbers are not straightforwardly preserved, but the source is now easily accessible online.

The abbreviation WLRC has been used for the Weill Lenya Research Centre, New York City. LoC has been used for the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

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