Act 2

STRANGER HERE MYSELF

L: So this is it, Weilli. We finally arrive in America. It’s kind of shabby, isn’t it?

W: Ach, you know, here you don’t just get to go straight to the best places. You have to earn your way up there.

L: Oh, for sure. But I think they heard of you already. You’ll make it.

W: And you too, Lenya-Benya. If …

L: If what?

W: Well. Are you going to stick with me this time? Everyone says I am mad to take you back.

L: Oh, Weillchen. You love me, don’t you?

W: Yes, but it was kind of dumb what you did. That Pasetti, I mean, what a crook. He ran away with all my money. You gonna keep falling for the pretty boys?

L: Probably. And you are going to keep falling for the pretty girls. And then we go back to our nice little home together.

W: Well, you are lucky that a good Jewish man always forgives his wife.

L: We’re still divorced.

W: For now. It’s a whole new future we have here, you know.

L: Oh yes, I know.

W: Wait here. I’ll find us a ….I don’t know, a taxi or a bus, or something.

THIS IS NEW

[Interlude text ] So maybe this is how it goes. I do love him, you know, in my way. I don’t do faithful in the way people normally expect, but then he doesn’t either. No-one else can look after him. And no-one else can sing his songs, the way I can. He doesn’t write properly without me, so we have to find a way to make it work. And who is to tell us our way is wrong? So we start again, don’t we? And this time it’s new, it’s different because we understand each other. And we’re here in a brand new place. It’s gonna be so good …. Swell, like they say it here. For real.

W: So what do you think, blumchen? How do we get to know people in America?

L: Ach, this is easy. Same way as Germany …. Parties!

[music]

L: [goes up to group] Good evening! My name is Lotte, I have just arrived here.

* Ah, but we know you, of course, Miss Lenya!
* Yes, we are big fans. You were splendid in Die Dreigroschenoper, what an artist!

[she wanders off]

L: Hallo!

* Miss Lenya! So good you are here. And is your husband, here? We are such admirers.
* Yes, indeed. You must come over to visit us. You know we have good German food.
* Ja, Kartoffelklößchen! [they laugh]

L: Weilli! This is not a good party! It is full of Germans!

[Milling around, new music]

W: [approaches group] Good evening. My name is Weill.

I: Gershwin.

W: Oh, Mr. Gershwin, pleased to meet you, your compositions are very interesting.

I: Nope, that’s my brother. I’m Ira, I do the lyrics. Say, George – come over here! [G comes over] Meet Kurt Weill. I think you know some of his work.

G: [wonders over, same time as Lenya] Sure I do. The Three Penny Opera, wasn’t it? That’s some pretty great music. Yeah, I remember now. Didn’t like the leading lady, voice like a hillbilly! Excuse me, I need to get my drink.

L: Well I never! Weilli, we’re going. Now! [they leave]

G [wanders back]. Hey, what happened?

I: I tink dey vent!

SEPTEMBER SONG

CG: So Herr Weill, you obviously found librettists to work with in America.

W: Of course. A whole list of them. Let me see now:

**Maxwell Anderson**

W: Now, Max. He was a good friend to me, always reliable and wrote some good words, you know. Complicated love life. One wife commits suicide and that’s sad. Two of them do it and you have to wonder if you are doing something wrong. Still, I can’t really talk about complicated love life, can I?

**Oscar Hammerstein**

W: Now, there was one major thing wrong with Oscar Hammerstein

CG: And what was that?

W: Richard Rogers. That Dummkopf decided to go off and work with that other guy. That was real stupid, should have stayed with me and been successful. Okay, they were successful. More than I was. But I could have written popular rubbish if I wanted.

**Ogden Nash**

W: He was good. He didn’t really take to writing libretti, though, more of a poet.

CG: Advice to the Married Man by Ogden Nash

To keep your marriage brimming, with love in the loving cup,

Whenever you're wrong, admit it; whenever you're right, shut up.

W: Wait, are you talking to me? Believe me, that is some advice I did not need anyone to tell me.

**Ira Gershwin**

Ah, Ira Gershwin, well, he was great after his stupid brother died. Okay, George Gershwin wasn’t stupid, although Lenya didn’t like him after he called her a, what was it … hillbilly? In fact the Gershwins were inspirations to me. I heard Porgy and Bess and wow! Boom! My eyes were opened. That was American music! So Ira worked with me after George died, and I was getting there you know. Really an American composer.

**Elmer Rice**

Ah, this was a privilege. We worked together, we had the rights to the play of another great, Langston Hughes, and we made Street Scene, an American Opera like the Gershwins would have done. And I could have done so much more, you know, I was working on …. But no point in ‘could have been’. I think I wrote some good music, you know.

ONE LIFE TO LIVE

MK: By the 1940’s the Weill’s were living in New City, New York State. This area around Southland Road became known as an artist’s colony, with Maxwell Anderson and his wife as neighbours, as well as luminaries such as actress Helen Hayes, and actor/producer John Houseman.

JF: Weill wanted to contribute to the war effort, and did so in the way he know best, writing a number of propaganda songs. But he was also persuaded by Anderson to become a member of the Ground Observer Corps, spotting planes from a costal observation tower.

[Weill and Airman are on phones opposite sides of stage]

Airman: Hello, Gabreski Air Base.

W: Yes, hello, here is Clarkstown Observation Tower. I want to report that here is all clear.

Airman: Okay, thanks. [put down phone] Hey, Tony. Just got a call from Clarkstown. I think the Germans already invaded!

BUDDY ON THE NIGHTSHIFT

MK: In the U.S. Lenya performed in various review-type shows, and performed on the radio during the War. But she had trouble winning roles stage roles, despite Weill’s effort to promote her. In 1945 he worked with Ira Gershwin on an operetta the Firebrand of Florence, and insisted that Lenya be given the lead part.

L: Look at this shit, Weilli. [throws newspapers on table]

W: What, reviews? Oh, I don’t look at them.

L: You do, you liar, it wasn’t the dog who read this first. So … the music is ‘great if a little overdone’, the book is nonsensical but …. the worst thing is leading lady, she is terrible and atrocious.

W: Oh, blumchen, it doesn’t say that. Not quite. Anyway, those people are stupid.

L: Weilli, it’s not working for me as a performer. I have to face up to it.

W: How do you mean?

L: I don’t fit in, here, not on the stage. I can’t get rid of my accent, or my style. You can change your music for America, and it works. But me …? No.

W: We just have to find the right part for you. I’ll write something better.

L: You tried, Weilli. It’s no good. I’m gonna retire. I’m going to be a good housewife, and I’m going to get very good at stiffing these stupid womens here in New City at cards.

W: Well, you’re already very good at cards. I’ll sure someday they’ll appreciate your performing, Lottchen, they can’t resist you forever. No-one can do that.

L: Pfff, who knows? I need a drink.

W: But Liebchen, it’s breakfast time.

L: Ja, that’s what I said.

SPEAK LOW

CB: 1950. Weill was working hard on a musical version of Huckleberry Finn with Maxwell Anderson, another step towards the definitive American opera that he was trying to create. One day he collapsed while playing tennis, and though he tried to ignore his condition he was dead of a heart attack within two weeks.

L: My Weilli. I didn’t want to go on after I lost you. I wanted to crawl into a hole and never come out. But I knew I had to carry on, because I found a new purpose in life, and that was to keep your memory and music alive, and to make sure everyone knew about you and what you did. They won’t forget you, Kurtchen. Your music will live on.

J: So, I think it is this way. Yes, look … a stage.

R: It’s a bit rubbish, isn’t it? I thought I was going to have a proper Broadway moment.

J: Come on. Look there’s an audience and everything.

R: I can’t believe I put on my good shoes for this.

J: Listen, my cherub. We are performers, we go where we are needed. From what I understand there is this guy they are making a show about, and he just died so we are supposed to come on, and do a song and dance to cheer everybody up.

R: Someone just died? But that’s terrible. When was this?

J: 1950.

R: What? I don’t get it.

J: Eh, don’t worry about it. Let’s have a little music.

MOON-FACED, STARRY-EYED first verse - Julien

R: Hey, have you got wine there?

J: Just a little, you know, to make the evening go with a smile.

R: You can’t do that. That’s disrespectful.

J: Of course, I can. I am French.

R: Oh give us some then. I’d rather drink than dance. [J passes glass. R knocks it back]

J: Oh, come on my little Scottish sweetie. Not even a few steps for me?

R: That’s horrible. Give us some more. [knocks back drink – hands glass to J]

R: Do you know. I suddenly feel better.

MOON-FACED, STARRY-EYED second verse – Ruth then dance break till end.

SW: After Weill’s death there was a memorial concert, and then a few months later, Weill’s original producer Ernst Aufricht spoke to Lenya, proposing a concert version of the Threepenny Opera in German, featuring Lenya. This was a success and led to stage parts for Lenya. Then a year later Leonard Bernstein conducted a concert version of a new translation of the Threepenny Opera by Marc Blitzstein. This lead to an off-Broadway production that became a landmark for the resurrection of Lenya’s career and the beginning of Weill’s recognition as one of the greats of Musial Theatre.

VS: Which he is, Ladies and Gentlemen, and that, I think, makes it time for a finale! Miss Lenya?

L: Yes?

VS: Do you think you could do the honours?

L: Oh, well. I guess so. How about a cautionary tale?

SAGA OF JENNY

L: You were right, in the end, Weilli, they did recognize me. I got parts, I got awards, I made records - I even got to be a very famous villain in a James Bond movie - that would’ve made you laugh. But I also did the best thing of all which was make sure your music is known across the world. I hope you know that Weilli, wherever you are.

LOST IN THE STARS

MACK THE KNIFE – WALK DOWN