

MIT Chamber Chorus
William Cutter, Director
Karen Harvey, Assistant Conductor

Ho, Billy, O! from *Love Life* Kurt Weill (1900-1950) and Alan Jay Lerner (1918-1986)

Brian Anderson, Michael Forbes, *tenors*
Mary Tsien, Marsha Bolton, *sopranos*
William Hawkins, Graham Wright, *baritones*

from *Three Pirate Songs* Peter Schickele (b. 1935)

1. Captain Fate
3. We have crossed the equator again

Men's chorus
Karen Harvey, piano

Duetto buffo di due gatti (Comic duet for two cats) Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Women's chorus
Karen Harvey, piano

My Bonnie Lass She Smelleth P.D.Q. Bach (1807-1742)?

PROGRAM NOTES

The German composer Kurt Weill (1900-1950) began his career as an operatic composer, with early successes including 1926's *Der Protagonist* and, with Bertolt Brecht, *Die Dreigroschen oper* (*The Three-Penny Opera*) in 1928. The phenomenal popular and critical success of the latter opera allowed Weill to devote himself exclusively to freelance compositions. However, the challenges of remaining true to his principles while appealing to “sophisticated” tastes proved wearing; in a 1929 letter to his publisher, he claimed “for years I have been the only creative musician to work consistently and uncompromisingly, against the resistance of the snobs and aesthetes, to create basic forms of a new, simple, popular musical theater.”

Such attitudes would prove costly in the increasingly hostile artistic climate of 1930's Europe, as Weill suddenly found his options limited by antagonistic theater directors and local politicians. Thus, when invited to the United States in 1935 for a production of his *Der Weg der Verheissung* (*The Eternal Road*), he remained even when the production was postponed. During his stay in America, he quickly established contacts with many of the leading names in Broadway, which culminated in nearly a dozen works written for the Broadway stage.

The “vaudeville” *Love Life*, written with Alan Jay Lerner in 1947 and 1948, is full of formal and technical innovations. An attempt to fuse social issues such as racial prejudice and persecution

with the style of American playwrights like Thornton Wilder and the traditions of European opera, within the constraints of earlier vaudeville productions, it was a “typical” Weill work only in as much as it broke completely new ground. The madrigal “**Ho, Billy, O!**” melds the expressiveness of the Renaissance madrigal with the idiom of his cabaret songs, breathing new life into an “outdated” musical form.

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) achieved lasting success in his operas of the 1810's and 1820's, notably *Semiramide* and *Guillaume Tell*, but then entered an early retirement, lasting nearly three decades. After leaving Italy for France in 1855, he once more returned to composing, writing the “sins of his old age” which were just as vital as his earlier operas. Many of his more mature compositions show a sly parodist at work, gently mocking rivals and friends alike. It is not known whether the *Due tto buffo di due gatti*, with its depiction of two stray cats vying for attention, is among the works of Rossini's later years, or if it is by Rossini at all. However, it is clear that Rossini would have appreciated the humor and energy of the piece.

Prof. Peter Schickele (b. 1935) bills himself as the world's leading expert on P. D. Q. Bach (1804-1742)?, the “last and least” of J. S. Bach's twenty-one children. However, Schickele is a composer in his own right, incorporating stylistic elements of jazz, rock, bluegrass, and folk music into his works. The *Three Pirate Songs* are a wistful and nostalgic look at the world of the sea chanty and drinking song.

Perhaps even more original are his “discoveries” of the works of P. D. Q. Bach, who in his “originality through incompetence” incorporated such modern ideas as polymeters—different groups of instruments playing in different time signatures—as well as “experimental instruments” such as bicycles and music stands, into the music of the Baroque and Classical periods in which he lived. Amongst the best known of P. D. Q. Bach's compositions for choir is the madrigal *My Bonnie Lass She Sm elleth*, another attempt at reviving the madrigal form through the incorporation of new stylistic elements.

—Ahmed E. Ismail