

Habilitation Thesis

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“Schuloper” and “Lehrstück”: Comparing Kurt Weill’s
He Who Says Yes and Hanns Eisler’s *The Measures
Taken*

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I. Research Background

From the late 1920s, the experimental genre of learning-plays (“Lehrstücke”) was an important manifestation of Brecht’s anti-Aristotelian epic theatrical concept – that is, a theatrical concept for the purposes of pedagogy, cognition, teaching, not pleasure. My personal experience in the production of Brecht/Weill’s school opera *He Who Says Yes* (2014, Palace of Arts Budapest) led me to the decision to get deeper engaged in the learning-play genre’s realized experience. During my research, I was faced with the drama of *He Who Says Yes* and Brecht/Eisler’s other learning-play, *The Measures Taken* pedagogical parables’ mutual rhyming, which I thought was worth considering as a habilitation dissertation.

Brecht/Weill *He Who Says Yes*’ first Hungarian performance was the 2014 Budapest production. The experience of the first performance of *The Measures Taken* – the Enrico Lübke directed 2017 Schauspiel Leipzig production – also brought me closer to write the dissertation. In Hungary, Brecht/Eisler’s work was not yet played, but Sándor Zsótér used parts of the text of *The Measures Taken* – without music – in his Brecht-direction *Fear and Misery* (*The*

Measures Taken), presented on December 20, 1998 in the Budapest Radnóti Theater.

II. Sources

The guidelines of the interpretation of the epic theatrical learning-play concept are in the notes of Brecht's *Színházi tanulmányok* (Magvető, Budapest, 1969), summarizing his theatrical concept notes. After *Mahagonny*, there was an experiment to learn to gain ever stronger emphasis on morality, at the expense of "culinary", meaning that pleasure articles should develop into study subjects, while certain institutions into publication organs. Of this process – in connection with the forthcoming *He Who Says Yes* school opera – there is an intriguing statement by Kurt Weill, which appeared in the first issue of 1930/31 *Die Musikpflege* (Verlag von Quelle & Meyer Leipzig). The complementary of *He Who Says Yes* and *He Who Says No* is explained by Peter Szondi, a literary scholar in the post-face of the book on twin learning-plays, published by Suhrkamp-Verlag. I found it important to support my observations and statements with these documents.

That records of a meeting, which assigned a starting point for designating topics for theme-areas of empirical research are the records of a debate, conducted by students after watching *He Who Says Yes*, a production of Karl-Marx-School in Berlin-Neukölln. "Protokolle von Diskussionen über den Jasager (Auszugweise) in der Karl-Max-Schule, Berlin-Neukölln, in Bertolt Brecht: *Stücke, Band IV* (Aufbau Verlag, Berlin, 1956).

The thread of this dissertation was influenced by Hanns Eisler's memoirs, aesthetic and political views, published collections, titled *Musik und Politik. Schriften 1924-1948* (VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig 1973). That we can read a significant number of evaluation of *The Measures Taken*, in the Hungarian language, we can thank Albrecht Betz, who published, also in Hungarian, *Hanns Eisler. Egy formálódó kor zenéje* (Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1978), and Eisler's *A zene értelméről és értelmetlenségéről* (Gondolat, Budapest, 1977).

The dissertation also analyzes the following *He Who Says Yes* recordings: Düsseldorf Children Choir, Düsseldorf Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Sigfried Köhler, 1954; Fredonia Chamber Singers, Kammerchor der Universität Dortmund, Orchester Campus Cantat 90, conducted by Willi Gundlach, 1990; Chor und Orchester des Alexander-von-Humboldt-Gymnasiums Konstanz, conducted by

Peter Bauer, 1991; Budapest Festival Orchestra. Palace of Arts
Festival Theatre Budapest, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, 2014.

III. Methodology

My dissertation examines the historical starting points of the realization of the parable, its pedagogical, dramaturgical, musical instruments and goals in the *He Who Says Yes* and *The Measure Taken* learning-plays. The aim of the research is to get to know the interpretations of the phenomena, processes, theoretical findings by the target audience (lecturers and audiences), also, the verification of my observations as teacher of a teacher training institution, opera singer and orchestral musician. The patterns of two-turn research that are tailored to the possibilities correspond to the division of the groups with the same drama, and the bare samples are small, but by their very nature are considered representative. The results of my research are aimed at the fact that the two investigated works are – not for the public but for an opportunity to self-development – to render more accurate reflections on the learning-play and more credible picture of their complexity.

IV. Results

My research, carried out among the target audiences and, placing divergent opinions next to each other, provided the authors with the intended purposes of discussing learning-play while, at the same time, offered an opportunity – supported by theoretical evidence – for a comparison of the two works. Throughout the discussions, many responders were able to handle the pedagogical, political and musical content of the learning-play independently from each other. Based on the research, the following theses can be formulated:

1. *He Who Says Yes* and *The Measure Taken* describe two supposed ways of sacrifice for the community. Apart from the technical (pedagogical and musical) means of achievement, the essence of teaching is the same in both school plays.
2. Public debate of the learning-plays, public scrutiny by the target audience, will help to deepen the understanding of the pedagogical parable. Comparison of reflections, based on experience analysis, allows the interpretation and shading of the not-requiring-audience Brecht learning-play concept.
3. The political content of *The Measures Taken*, from the

perspective of our time, is only intended to illustrate the lesson. Artistic content in the learning-play is a tool for highlighting the lesson, that is, the pedagogical goal of the lessons, but it is also possible to treat them independently of each other.

4. The musical analysis of the pedagogical parable contributes to the fact that adequate expression of the playwright's concept is a tool of educational activity.

5. The professional observations of the lecturers fill the theoretical foundations of *He Who Says Yes* and *The Measures Taken* with important technical details of the realization. However, the differing responses from the real experiences of research also point to the similarities and distinctions of the two learning-plays.

Brecht's reputation has remained unbroken over the past five decades, irrespective of power structures: his significance in world literature is not diminished by his political orientation. Such an assessment – from the perspective of posterity – can be exemplary for artists representing different world views, and at the same time

producing genuine artistic value. A similar reevaluation process is taking place today – but is yet unfinished – in the judgment about Weill's and Eisler's oeuvre too.

I was nourished by a hope during my work: that in our domestic music pedagogical practice and in our music theatre culture, sooner or later there will emerge a demand for those works of Brecht and his fellow composers, whose existence in the last eighty-five years was barely noticeable, to enter into the circle of *The Threepenny Opera* which currently short-ends with the awareness of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. With this objective, my habilitation dissertation aims to open the path not yet been passed by a home-grown Brecht reception.

V. Documentation of the actions related to the habilitation thesis

Asztalos Bence: „'Lehrstück' az iskolai neveléshez – Brecht/Weill: Aki igent mond”. in: *Parlando*, 2018/5, (ISSN 2063-1979)

Asztalos Bence: „*Lehrstück*” a politikai-esztétikai neveléshez – Brecht/Eisler: *Az intézkedés (Die Maßnahme)*. XI. Képzés és Gyakorlat Nemzetközi Neveléstudományi Konferencia. Organiser and place: Kaposvári Egyetem, 2018

Asztalos Bence: *A japán Taniko-mese Brecht/Weill Aki igent mond című iskolaoperájában*. A mese interdiszciplináris megközelítései. Nemzetközi tudományos konferencia. Organiser and place: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Tanító- és Óvóképző Kar, 2018

Asztalos Bence: *Buddhista tanmese Brecht tandrámáiban*. II. Nemzetközi Kisgyermek-nevelési Konferencia. Organiser and place: Apor Vilmos Katolikus Főiskola, 2018

Asztalos Bence: *A tandrámák műfaji kísérlete az epikus zenés színházban*. (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe keretében). Organiser and place: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia SZAB, 2017

Asztalos Bence: *Iskolaopera és tándráma Brecht epikus zenésszínházában az 1920-as, '30-as évek fordulóján*. A pedagógusképzés múltja, jelene és jövője. Jubileumi konferencia az esztergomi érseki tanítóképzés 175., az óvodapedagógus-képzés 125. és a tanárképzés 25. évfordulója alkalmából. Organiser: Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem BTK. Place: Esztergom Iohanneum, 2017

Asztalos Bence: *Zene a politikai hatalom megszerzéséért – Hanns Eisler: Az intézkedés*. Nemzetközi Zenei Konferencia. Organiser and place: SZTE JGYPK Ének-zene Tanszék, 2017

Asztalos Bence: „Kurt Weill: Aki igent mond.” in: Dombi Józsefné, Asztalos Bence (szerk.): *Évfordulós Művészek. Tanulmánykötet*. SZTE JGYPK Művészeti Intézet Ének-zene Tanszék, Szeged, 2015, pp. 83-84. (ISBN 978-615-5455-13-1)

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond*. Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Millenáris Teátrum Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, June 7, 2015

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond*. Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Művészetek Palotája Fesztiválszínház Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, September 10, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond*. Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Szabó Lőrinc Kéttannyelvű Általános Iskola és Gimnázium Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 10, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond*. Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Berzsényi Dániel Gimnázium Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 11, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond*. Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Kodály Zoltán Ének-zenei Általános Iskola, Gimnázium és Zeneiskola Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 12, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Lycée Français Gustave Eiffel de Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 13, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar., Városmajori Gimnázium Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 14, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. MagHáz Centrum Maglód, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 17, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. American International School Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 18, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Dr. Szepesi László Mezőgazdasági, Erdészeti Szakközépiskola Piliscsaba, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 19, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. ELTE Radnóti Miklós Gimnázium és Gyakorlóiskola Budapest, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 20, 2014

Kurt Weill: *Aki igent mond.* Budapesti Fesztiválzenekar. Ács Sportcsarnok, concertmaster: Asztalos Bence, conducted by Jankó Zsolt, directed by Novák Eszter, November 21, 2014

Hanns Eisler: *Septett* No.1 Op.92A (Variations on American Children's Songs), MR3 Bartók Rádió, March 9, 2011