The Threepenny Opera Worth a Million

Popular Off-Broadway Show by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill Staged by Brooklyn College, May 5-15

In one of their most ambitious productions, the Department of Theater and the Conservatory of Music of Brooklyn College will present The Threepenny Opera, one of Off-Broadway's longest-running shows.

The musical's theme song, “Mack the Knife,” is a much-loved standard—made famous by Louis Armstrong and Bobby Darin—and audiences are sure to enjoy hearing the piece as it was originally written.

“It’s much darker and more brooding,” says Samuel L. Leiter, chairman of the Brooklyn College Department of Theater. “It’s a rather rough-edged depiction of human greed and corruption—and it’s comic as well.”

This production is the first collaboration between the Department of Theater and the Conservatory of Music in many years, Leiter says. “It’s an elaborate and wonderful undertaking.”

The Threepenny Opera, by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, was inspired by the 1728 comic ballad opera The Beggar’s Opera, by John Gay. Unlike the idealized fantasies of other stage productions of the time, The Beggar’s Opera looked at the seedy underbelly of society through the eyes of its resident prostitutes and thieves. In 1922 a London revival of the play struck a chord with Brecht, who adapted the work to be a critique of the bourgeois conventions of the day.

Incorporating contemporary cabaret-style music by Weill, Brecht reset The Beggar’s Opera in Victorian London and stripped the main character, Macheath, of all redeeming qualities, thereby imbuing The Threepenny Opera with an even darker vision of humanity and giving it a compelling context for its premiere in Weimar-era Germany in 1928.

The 1954 Off-Broadway production ran for a then-astounding six years and was seen by more than 750,000 patrons who paid collectively $3 million to sit in the 299-seat theater.

The Brooklyn College production will feature a cast of twenty accompanied by an orchestra. Macheath will be played by Dirk Weiler, M.F.A., ’02, who was born in Germany in 1967.

Thursday, May 5, through Sunday, May 15

Mack the Knife
Lyrics by Bertolt Brecht, Music by Kurt Weill

“Mack the Knife” was written in 1928 as the theme for The Threepenny Opera and became an enormously popular song when Louis Armstrong recorded it in 1955. Although CBS Radio banned his initial recording, contending that it glorified a gangster and promoted juvenile delinquency, MGM countered by releasing a new version without lyrics, in which Armstrong whistled the first few bars. That single sold a million copies. When Bobby Darin recorded the song in 1958, it shot to No. 1 on the Billboard chart, where it stayed for weeks and eventually won a Grammy for best song.

DECADE BY DECADE: OUR 75TH ANNIVERSARY!

Here are some particularly memorable moments from the past seventy-five years at Brooklyn College.

1930s

1930 September 18. Brooklyn College classes were first held in rented rooms in downtown Brooklyn office buildings.

1932 June 21. Brooklyn College celebrated its first Commencement Exercises, awarding diplomas to eighty-nine students. The valedictorian was Bernard H. Stern, who would later teach English at Brooklyn College for thirty-seven years. In 1989 he donated $250,000 to establish the Stern Professorship in Humor, a rotating faculty position in humor studies.

1935 October 2. Ground was broken by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia for the creation of the Brooklyn College campus in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn.
1940s

1941 December 8. Classes were suspended and five thousand students stood on the Quadrangle at 12:30 p.m. to listen to President Roosevelt’s “Day of Infamy” speech broadcast from speakers on the balcony outside of President Gideonse’s Boylan Hall office.


1948 April. A year after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Brooklyn College student Thelma Porter became the first African American to be named Miss Subways. Currently Thelma Parros lives in South Carolina, but her son Peter Parros is still in Brooklyn. He plays Dr Ben Harris in As the World Turns, a television soap opera produced in the Midwood NBC studios.

1950s

1950 The computer age dawned at BC. The College Library introduced IBM punch cards to replace borrowing slips.


1956 Construction on the Hillel Building, now the Alexander and Brenda Tanger Hillel at Brooklyn College, began in the spring. Germania Place was renamed Hillel Place.

1960s

1961 April 20. The Ditmas House, built in 1827, was torn down to make way for the new Student Center.

1962 April 11. Brooklyn College joined six other municipal colleges to form the City University of New York, creating the second largest university in the world. November 28. The Student Center (Student Union Building Organization) opened.

1963 September 13. The Brooklyn College Newman Catholic Center opened at 1260 Ocean Avenue. November 18. Marty Markowitz was elected to SGS Student Governing Counsel. In 2001 he would be elected Brooklyn borough president.

1964 March 20: A new television center opened in Whitehead Hall. November 26. Plans to expand the campus were unveiled. New buildings included James Hall, Plaza Building, and the Roosevelt and Ingersoll Hall extensions.

1969 The Student Center grew two stories, from four floors to six.

1970s

1974 April 26. The four new buildings on campus—James Hall, Plaza Building, and the Roosevelt and Ingersoll Hall extensions—were formally dedicated the same week that Randolph Evans, the College’s original architect, died.

1976 June 23. Members of Brooklyn College’s largest class, nearly six thousand students, attended graduation ceremonies in blistering heat.

1980 November 25. Faculty Council voted 68 to 11 to create a core curriculum of ten courses to be required of all undergraduates. In 1986 Time Magazine wrote that, thanks to “the most tightly structured core curriculum in the U.S.,” a Brooklyn College student received “a first-class education at fourth-class prices.”

1981 During the summer Biology Professor Roy McGowan completely refurbishes the Lily Pond.

1987 May 15. Franklin Roosevelt Jr. came to the College to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Midwood campus that his father had visited in 1936.

1990s

1991 December 4. Lisette Nieves, a history major, was named one of thirty-two Americans in the 1992 class of Rhodes Scholars. December 10. Toba Friedman received a Marshall Scholarship

1993 April 22. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., opened. The Tower of Life, a major exhibit, consists of approximately one thousand reproductions of prewar photographs of Jewish life, gathered from more than one hundred families of the shtetl Eishyshok by Brooklyn College Judaic Studies Professor Yaffa Eliach, ’67, who spent her early childhood in that town.

1994 President Bill Clinton chooses Brooklyn College as the site for a major address on community service and crime prevention.

2000s

2000 Christoph M. Kimmich became the eighth president of Brooklyn College. A faculty member of the History Department since 1973, Kimmich had been appointed Brooklyn College provost in 1989. In 1997 he was named interim Chancellor of the City University of New York, a post he held for more than two years.

A maintenance crew working on Boylan Hall discovered a large copper box in a hollowed-out doormat. The College archivist, Professor Anthony M. Cucchiara carefully examined the time capsule, which was found to contain a copy of the New York Times dated October 29, 1936; the 1936–37 Brooklyn College Bulletin, in which classes for men and women were listed separately; architectural plans for the campus; and sixty-six cents, consisting of a penny, a nickel, a dime, and a Tercentenary fifty-cent piece, all minted in 1936.

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BIRTHDAY EVENTS

Tuesday, May 3
Lecture. "Around the World Goes Around: Brazilian Diasporic Performance in the U.S." Jason Stacyek, assistant professor of ethnomusicology, University of Richmond. Sponsored by the Institute for Studies in American Music, the Conservatory of Music, the Department of Africana Studies, the American Studies program, the Women's Studies program, the Women's Center, the Center for Diversity and Multicultural Studies, and the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities. 1:30 p.m., State Lounge, Student Center.

Tuesday, May 3, through Friday, May 6
Volunteer Days. Campus and neighborhood cleanup. Sponsored by the Division of Student Life. For details, call (718) 951-5842.

Tuesday, May 3, through Friday, June 3
M.F.A. Art Exhibition. Sponsored by the Art Department. Tuesday, May 3, 6 p.m.: Opening night reception. For details, call (718) 951-5572. Cadman Plaza West, downtown Brooklyn.

Thursday, May 5, through Sunday, May 15
Theater. The Threepenny Opera, by Bertolt Brecht. Featuring the winner of the Conservatory Concerto Competition. 7 p.m., Whitman Hall, $5.

Monday, May 9
Undergraduate Open House. Information on the application process, financial aid, programs, and majors. To reserve a spot or for more information, call (718) 951-5001, or e-mail admqny@brooklyn.cuny.edu. 6 p.m., Student Center.

Composers Concert I. Douglas Cohen, faculty coordinator. Lynnette Williams, program coordinator. Conservatory of Music students present their new acoustic and electro-acoustic works. 7 p.m., Levenson Recital Hall.

Monday, May 9, through Saturday, December 11
Archives exhibition. Material from the Brooklyn College Library collections displayed at locations throughout the campus.

Tuesday, May 10
75th Birthday Party. Special guests, light refreshments, entertainment. 1:30 p.m., the Quadrangle.

Conservatory Orchestra. Ken Selden, director. Featuring the winner of the Conservatory Concerto Competition. 7 p.m., Whitman Hall, $5.

Wednesday, May 11
Conservatory Wind Ensemble. Paul Corn, director. 7 p.m., Whitman Hall, $5.

Thursday, May 12
Health Fair. Sponsored by the Division of Student Life. 1:30 p.m., the Quadrangle.

Brooklyn College Chorale. Jonathan Babcock, director. 2 p.m., Levenson Recital Hall, $5.

Latino/Latina Achievement Showcase. Sponsored by the Latino Faculty and Staff Organization. 5:30 p.m., Student Center.

Scenes from Great Operas. Tom Culicte, Monica Harte, and William Woodruff, directors. 7 p.m., Levenson Recital Hall.

Friday, May 13
Annual spring seminar. “Personal Liberties in the Age of Terrorism.” Keynote speakers: Norman Siegel, civil liberties lawyer; and Steven A. Carlotto, chief, Division Counsel, FBI. Continental breakfast and lunch. Sponsored by the Metropolitan New York Library Council and the Brooklyn College Library. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Brooklyn College Library. $25; $10 students.

Brooklyn College Science Research Day. Student poster session and awards ceremony. Sponsored by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) program, the NIH Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) program, the National Science Foundation Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (AMP) program, the New York State (NYS) Collegiate Science and Technology Entry program (CSTEP), and the NYS Science and Technology Entry program (STEP). For information, call Florence Kempen, MARC coordinator, (718) 951-5171. 10 a.m., Student Center.

Saturday, May 14
Alumni Athletic Hall of Fame. Reinauguration and team reunion dinner. Gold and Maroon Rooms, Student Center. For details, contact the Office of Athletics, (718) 951-5366.

Monday, May 16
Composers Concert II. Douglas Cohen, faculty coordinator. Lynnette Williams, program coordinator. Conservatory of Music students present their new acoustic and electro-acoustic works. 7 p.m., Levenson Recital Hall.

Thursday, May 19
Undergraduate Adult Degree Programs Open House. For more information, call (718) 951-5525. 6 p.m., Student Center.

Sunday, May 22
The Mammoth Follies. The Hudson Vagabond Players present a musical trip through the Stone Age for children ages four through ten. 2 p.m., Whitman Hall, $15.

Suzuki Benefit Concert. Sponsored by the Brooklyn College Preparatory Center for the Performing Arts. 4 p.m., Gershwin Theater, $25.

Wednesday, May 25
Faculty Day. Panels, roundtable discussions, posters, and performances. 10 a.m., Student Center.

Tuesday, May 31
Graduation luncheon. The Black Faculty and Staff Association Recognition of Achievement Reception for graduating seniors. 1:30 p.m., Student Center.

Wednesday, June 1
Twenty-third Annual Student Film Festival. Brooklyn College students present their original films. For information, call (718) 951-5664. 7:30 p.m., Gershwin Theater.

Thursday, June 2
Commencement. 10 a.m., the Quadrangle.

Tuesday, June 14
Adult Degree Programs Q & A Session. Saul Bethany, discussion leader. Information packets for prospective students. For more information, call (718) 951-5525. 6:30 p.m., 3223 Boylan Hall.

Thursday, September 29
Gala Alumni Reunion. For information, call (718) 951-5065. 7 p.m., The Rainbow Room, Manhattan.

Thursday, October 27

Tuesday, November 8, and
Wednesday, November 9
Electro-Acoustic Music Festival. Compositions by Conservatory of Music students. 7 p.m., Levenson Recital Hall.

All events are free unless otherwise noted. Programs in the Student Center require a valid Brooklyn College ID or a Community Resident Pass for admission (see page 3). For tickets and information about events at Whitman Hall, Gershwin Theater, and the New Workshop Theater, call the box office, (718) 951-4500.
A festiv e celebration in the spring marked the official naming of the state-of-the-art computer lab as the Morton and Angela Topfer Library Café in recognition of the couple’s $1 million gift. Morton Topfer, ’59, is the founder and managing director of Castletop Capital, an Austin-based investment firm, which focuses primarily on real estate. He is best known for his celebrated careers at Motorola, Inc., and Dell Computer Corp., where he helped develop pager and cell phone technologies that are now considered indispensable.

2001 The College launched The On-Course Advantage (TOCA), a program that enables qualified, highly motivated, full-time students to complete their studies in four years.

2002 The boldly designed and expanded Brooklyn College Library opened in the fall, effortlessly pairing the neo-Georgian architecture of La Guardia Hall with a sleek modern addition and advanced technologies. The new library has 21.5 miles of shelving, five hundred computers, two multimedia classrooms, five computerized classrooms, and a 145-seat auditorium fully equipped with state-of-the-art video and computer technology.

2003 In The Best 345 Colleges, 2003 edition, the Princeton Review cited Brooklyn College as the Morton Topfer Library Café and ranked the College fifth in the nation for “Best Academic Advantage” and for its friendly, diverse campus.

2004 In The Best 345 Colleges, 2004 edition, the Princeton Review again cites Brooklyn College for its beauty and value.

2005 The Princeton Review’s new publication, America’s Best Value Colleges, placed Brooklyn College third in the nation, just behind the University of North Carolina and Amherst College.

Work began to expand the ever-popular Morton and Angela Topfer Library Café to double its original size.

Eugene Shenderov, ’05, a chemistry major, was named a Rhodes Scholar, and also won a prestigious grant from the National Institutes of Health to pursue research at Oxford University.

Demolition of the Bedford Avenue overpass launched the West Quad Project, which is inspired by the original 1937 architectural design of the campus. Plaza Building will be taken down. In its place, there will be a new West Quadrangle and a new West Quad building, designed by the prestigious architect Rafael Viñoly, which will consolidate several student services and house a state-of-the-art physical education and athletics facility.

Come to the library for a day to see if either of these options is right for you. You may obtain a free one-day library card for an exploratory visit. To request a one-day pass or for more information, call 718-951-5346 or 718-951-5335.

RECREATION PASS
Recreation passes are available to all students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members. Facilities include tennis courts, a fitness center, and a basketball gym. Come to Brooklyn College for fun, fitness, and relaxation!

To check rates or pick up a schedule, stop by the Recreation Center, 125 Roosevelt Hall, or call 718-951-5366.

Note: Due to construction of the new West Quad building, the Brooklyn College pool and racquetball courts are closed. We apologize for the inconvenience. A newly designed athletic center will open in the future, featuring a state-of-the-art fitness center and a competition-sized pool. We’ll keep you posted!

COMMUNITY RESIDENT ID PASS
Brooklyn College welcomes you to explore and enjoy our campus. The college will issue a photo ID to residents from neighborhoods that border the campus. To obtain a pass you will need to provide proof of local residency—such as a utility bill—and photo identification. For more information, drop by the Office of Campus and Community Safety Services, 0202 Ingersoll Hall, or call 718-951-5511.

Tell us how Brooklyn College might be a better neighbor.
Send your suggestions to: Brooklyn College Institutional Advancement 2900 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11210 Call (718) 951-5391 or e-mail us at communitycomments@brooklyn.cuny.edu.
Let us know if you wish to be on our mailing list.