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### The Beggars Opera

Kansas State College of Pittsburg

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ANNIVERSARY

10<sup>th</sup>

SEASON

1971

PLAYHOUSE  
ON  
BROADWAY

SUMMER

K

S

C

THEATRE



## presents

Irelene  
Swain

# Dorothy Parmele

in

a Benjamin Britten Setting of the  
Pepusch-Gay Ballad Opera

Directed by

DR. LAURENCE SIEGLE

## CAST

Beggar	IRELENE SWAIN
Mr. Peachum	DANA CROW
Mrs. Peachum	IRELENE SWAIN
Polly	DOROTHY PARMEL
Macheath	JOHNNY MILLER
Filch	GARY GREEN
Lockit	RICH LAMER
Lucy Lockit	PAT PAHLMAN
Mrs. Trapes	JUDY LEE
Jenny Diver	DENISE MUNCY
Mrs. Coaxer	CHARLOTTE KELLOGG
Dolly Trull	MARY LYONS
Mrs. Vixen	VICKY LARSON
Betty Doxy	LEAH EASTBURN
Mrs. Slammekin	LINDA CRAYCRAFT
Sukey Tawdry	CHERYL DAVIS
Molly Brazen	GERRI WRIGHT
Mat o' the Mint	JOHN PINKSTON
Ben	ED STEWART
Ned	BART SCHASTEEN
Harry	GARY GREEN

Rehearsal Pianist \_\_\_\_\_ CAROL SUE MAXWELL  
Preparation of Chorus \_\_\_\_\_ FRANK HUNTER  
Chorus Pianist \_\_\_\_\_ JEAN FRITSCHÉ  
Pianist \_\_\_\_\_ CAROL SUE MAXWELL

The action takes place in London.  
The year is 1727.

## ACT I

### Scene 1—Peachum's Lock

## ACT II

Scene 1—A Tavern near Newgate  
Scene 2—Macheath's cell, Newgate Prison  
Scene 3—Another part of the prison

### ACT III

Scene 1—Another part of the prison  
Scene 2—Peachum's Lock  
Scene 3—Another part of the prison  
Scene 4—Macheath's cell, Newgate Prison

The taking of pictures in this theatre is strictly forbidden.

Produced by special arrangement with  
Boosey and Hawkes, Inc.

## Credits

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## STAFF FOR PLAYHOUSE-ON-BROADWAY

Chairman, Speech and Theatre Dept.,	Dr. Harold Loy
Director, Summer Theatre Program,	Mr. Barry Bengtsen
Directors _____	Dr. Cary Clasz
_____	Mr. Robert Gobetz
_____	Dr. Laurence Siegle
_____	Mr. Don Ramsey
Designer _____	Mr. Barry Bengtsen
Scenic Artist _____	Mr. Larry Randolph
Technical Director _____	Mr. James Scott
Stage Manager _____	Mr. John Bedford
Business Manager _____	Mr. Garry Charter
House Manager _____	Mr. Dan Crutcher
Master Electrician _____	Mr. Mike Taylor
Costumier _____	Mr. Ron Heilman
Seamstress _____	Mrs. Kathy DeSandro
Master Carpenter _____	Mr. Dennis Detlefson
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**Fire Notice:** The exit indicated by a red light and sign nearest to the seat you occupy is the shortest route to the street. In the event of fire or other emergency please do not run—WALK TO THAT EXIT. Thoughtless persons annoy patrons and endanger the safety of others by lighting matches or smoking in prohibited areas during the performance and intermissions. This violates a City Ordinance and renders the offender subject to a FINE OF \$500.00; IMPRISONMENT OF SIX (6) MONTHS; OR BOTH.



## DRAMA PROGRAM NOTES

With the appearance of John Gay's Beggar's Opera in 1728, English comedy began to sing. This astonishing musical play, the ancestor of the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan and of twentieth-century musical comedy as well, seems most readily comparable in the modern era to Guys and Dolls, in which boisterous fun and extravagant fastidiousness on the part of characters from the seamy side of life generated an archness which is both disarming and preposterous.

When it was new, The Beggar's Opera was relished for its burlesque. It satirized the clichés and set arias of Italian opera, then the darling rage of London, and (in the squabbles of Polly Peachum and Lucy Lockit) the bickerings of Cuzzoni and Faustina, rival Italian sopranos of gorgeous temperament whose partisans more than once came to blows; it satirized social corruption, gambling for high stakes, and the vogue for drinking gin—recently introduced from Holland and suspiciously "foreign"; it satirized political dishonesty and the bureaucratic mind (not yet vanquished from the face of the earth); and, above all, it parodied the airs and graces of affectedly fine ladies and gentlemen by parading those graces in the persons of pimps, prostitutes, and pickpockets, highwaymen, and informers. In the plots of Peachum and Lockit, first-night audiences detected reference to the power-politics of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, and his brother-in-law, Lord Townshend; but any age can savor the self-serving of a receiver of stolen goods and a jail-warden when they pretend absurdly to the sensitivities of gentlemen of quality. Similarly, when Mrs. Peachum warns her lovely daughter Polly, not against men but against marriage—"Why must our Polly, forsooth, differ from her sex, and love only her husband?"—some cherished ideas of fashionable society are clearly being taken for a ride.

The melodies of the play took no prize for originality, nor were they intended to. Dr. John Peter Pepusch orchestrated the airs of popular songs, ballad-tunes, and country dances—he did, it may be noted, provide his own overture—and so produced an "opera" guaranteed singable and familiar even before its first performance. For good measure, he appropriated one tune by Handel, at that time active as an opera impresario in London, forcing a solemn march from Rinaldo to accompany an impudent tavern song; more, he laid hands upon Henry Purcell's patriotic song "Britons, Strike Home!" so that the condemned highwayman might sing defiantly, "Since I must swing, I scorn to wince or whine."

This early "ballad opera," as it was reasonably called, achieved the distinction of 63 performances in its first run; Lavinia Fenton, the first "Polly," attracted the attention of a duke—not the first actress to do such a thing, surely—becoming first his kept mistress and finally his duchess; her successor in the stage role met a similar happy fate; William Hogarth painted scenes from the production and sold hundreds of lithographic copies of his paintings; Polly, Macheath, and their playmates appeared on fans and playing-cards, on firescreens and shawls.



The Beggar's Opera was the rage of society. John Rich, the theater-manager who had hesitated to produce the piece, reaped a handsome profit, while John Gay, an improvident and trusting man, sensibly entrusted his new-won wealth to his friends among the "quality" for investment. The verdict of the town was well-turned: "The Beggar's Opera had made Gay rich—and Rich, gay."

—Dr. Charles Guardia

### MUSIC PROGRAM NOTES

A number of unique problems are present in the composition of an opera because the form combines various aspects of three different arts. The demands of the text require that the music mirror the thought expressed. Specific dramatic situations often create the need for dramatic action. Music demands time in which to develop and must not be subservient to either the text or the drama. These requirements often seem to work in different directions. In a very real sense, all three arts must be shaped and united in such a way that they compliment each other. Additional problems are created by the very nature of The Beggar's Opera. It is a period opera which utilized the original music from the eighteenth-century production. A modern version must therefore represent the eighteenth century and still be a product of the twentieth-century musical thought.

Few composers of the twentieth century are as prepared to meet these demands as is Benjamin Britten. He has been extraordinarily productive in all areas of dramatic music, including opera, incidental music, film music, and radio music and is uncommonly aware of the problems such music presents. Although he is an expert in the area of instrumental music, his vocal music seems to be more important. Words stimulate, if not absorb, his imagination. He has an affinity with Purcell, and many of the techniques of the Baroque Era have been assimilated into his technique. His compositions have included numerous arrangements of folk-songs, as well as works which are based on themes by other composers. His instinctive understanding of English music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, together with his rare talent for imbuing his works with clarity and zest, mark him as a unique twentieth-century representative of the Baroque spirit.

Britten's setting of The Beggar's Opera is an excellent combination of eighteenth-century lightness and twentieth-century technique. He has retained all but three of the original airs and has reset them in his own highly personal modern harmonic idiom. Throughout the work he has retained Baroque polyphonic devices, such as passacaglia and chaconne. The music is basically tonal and never so dissonant as to obscure the eighteenth-century flavor. The most striking dissonances are dictated by the dramatic situation and are usually employed to represent the most unsavory characters in the story. The work as a whole is a remarkable achievement and casts Britten into the mold described by Playford: "He was particularly admired for his Vocal Music, having a Peculiar Genius to express the Energy of English Words, whereby he mov'd the Passions as well as caused Admiration in all his Auditors."

—Dr. Donald R. Key