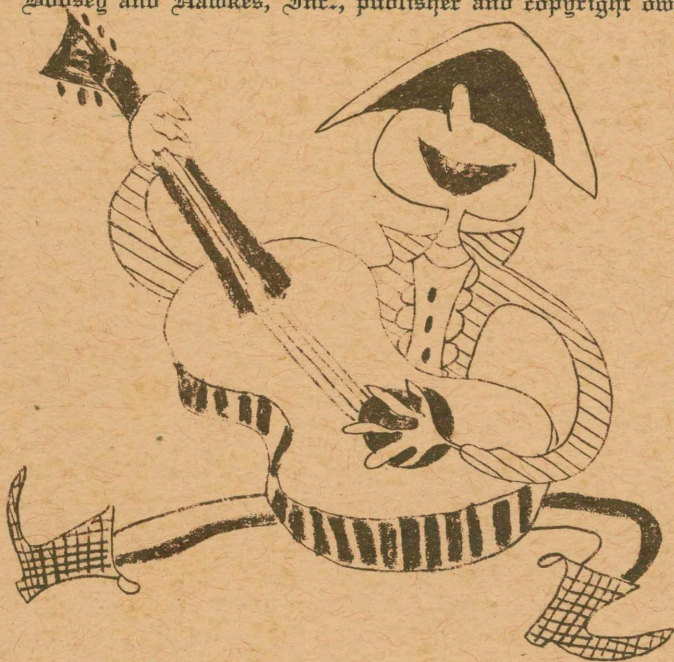


Kansas State College of Pittsburg

Presents

# The Beggar's Opera

a ballad-opera by John Gay in a new musical version realized from the original airs by Benjamin Britten. By special arrangement with Boosey and Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.



Graduate and Undergraduate students of the Opera Theatre  
with  
Members of the Summer Session Orchestra

McCray Auditorium

July 28, 29, 1965

8:15 p.m.



## 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 vanished 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 pick-pockets, 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



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Beggar	ROZELEE STEPHENS	
Mr. Peachum	HARRY WALKER	Bass
Filch	DALE SULLENS	Tenor
Mrs. Peachum	ROZELEE STEPHENS	Contralto
Polly	KARLA GRANT	Soprano
Captain Macheath	JAMES KNEEBONE	Tenor
Lockit	PHIL MORGAN	Baritone
Luck Lockit	SARA LOU KAPPLE	Mezzo-Soprano
Mrs. Trapes	SANDRA KUNGLE	Mezzo-Soprano
Jenny Diver	RUTH SCHNACKENBURG	Soprano
Mrs. Vixen	LINDA WEATHERMAN	Mezzo-Soprano
Sukey Tawdry	MARLENE HUBBARD	Soprano
Mrs. Coaxer	BETTY WINTLE	Soprano
Dolly Trull	SANDRA KUNGLE	Mezzo-Soprano
Mrs. Slammekin	IMOGENE NORTH	Mezzo-Soprano
Molly Brazen	LOIS WHITEMORE	Mezzo-Soprano
Betty Doxy	SUE ZAN NORTH	Soprano
Mat o' the Mint	CARL MATHIS	Tenor
Harry Paddington	PHIL MORGAN	Baritone
Ben Budge	MORTON CUPLIN	Bass
Wat Dreary	KEN WAGENER	Baritone
Nimming Ned	RUSTY PICKERING	Tenor
Drawer	MORTON CUPLIN	
Constable	CARL MATHIS	

## OPERA ORCHESTRA PERSONNEL

WALTER OSADCHUK, Conductor

<i>Violins</i>	<i>Bass</i>	<i>Bassoon</i>
Markwood Holmes	Jim Wintle	Danny Duncan
John Jarboe	<i>Flute</i>	<i>Horn</i>
Catherine Adams	Mary Ann Creitz	Rosetta McDougal
Mary Pierce		
<i>Violas</i>	<i>Oboe</i>	<i>Harp</i>
Karen Salsbury	John Walker	Janis Goble
Margaret Nichols	<i>Clarinet</i>	<i>Percussion</i>
<i>Cellos</i>	Roma Jean Turner	Ed Martin
William Elliott		
Susan Strawn		

## STAFF

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY LAURENCE W. SIEGLE	
COLLEGE ORCHESTRA UNDER THE DIRECTION OF WALTER OSADCHUK	
Set and Program Design	LARRY BRADSHAW
Rehearsal Pianist	MAX PLUMMER
Choral Preparation	HUBERT BIRD
Chorus Pianist	JACK BRIECE
Stage Manager	KEN WAGENER
Costume Mistress	IMOGENE NORTH
Property Mistress	MARIETTA OSBORNE



## 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, and others of equal importance, 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 utilizes 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 folksongs, 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 cast 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