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Mark Blitzstein's "Regina": A pivotal work in American musical theatre

Foradori, Anne Bill, D.M.A.
The Ohio State University, 1994

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MARC BLITZSTEIN'S REGINA: A PIVOTAL WORK IN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate College of The Ohio State University

by

Anne Bill Foradori, B.M., M.M.

* * * *

The Ohio State University
1994

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School of Music
Copyright by
Anne Bill Foradori
1994
To Mark and Charlie for their love and support

To Bill Rudman who introduced me to this work nearly twenty years ago
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the efforts of many who assisted with this project--my DMA Document committee--Ms. Eileen Davis, chair, and members Dr. Robin Rice and Dr. Patrick Woliver. Special thanks to Dr. Woliver for his special efforts as editor. I am also indebted to my friend, Bill Rudman--for his editorial assistance, expertise, and support; and to my husband, Mark Foradori--for a keen editorial eye and for helping me to keep a fresh perspective in my writing.

Special thanks to Stephen Davis and the Marc Blitzstein Estate for permission to reprint Blitzstein's wonderful notes and correspondence about Regina. Special thanks to The State Historical Society of Wisconsin--for access to Blitzstein's papers, and to Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation for permission to reprint excerpts from the score of Regina.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, and colleagues who have remained supportive throughout my doctoral studies of the last five years. To all, my sincerest thanks.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECITAL I</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECITAL II</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECITAL III</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECITAL IV</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>xi, xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. MARC BLITZSTEIN-- BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LIBRETTO OF REGINA</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. REGINA--ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL SCORE</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER I: MARC BLITZSTEIN-- BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### I. MARC BLITZSTEIN

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

**Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes**

Plot Synopsis of *The Little Foxes*

Blitzstein's Libretto

**III. REGINA--ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL SCORE**

The Concept

Vocal Writing

Form and Structure

Harmonic Structure

Melodic and Rhythmic Motives

Orchestration

Use of Underscoring Dramatic Situation

Use of Chorus

Versions of *Regina*
RECITAL I

Anne Foradori, soprano
Robin Rakes, piano

Friday, November 9, 1990, 8:00 p.m.
Weigel Hall Auditorium

PROGRAM

Ch’io mi scordi di te?, K.505 W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Vier Lieder, op.27 Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
Ruhe, meine Seele
Cacilie
Heimliche Aufforderung
Morgen!

INTERMISSION

King David Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Four Songs, op.22
There was a Maiden
Madrigal
The Widow Bird
Girl’s Song

Cinq Melodies Georges Bizet (1838-1875)
Pastorale
Chanson d’Avril
Ouvre ton Coeur
Vielle Chanson
Tarentelle
RECITAL II

Anne Foradori, soprano
Robin Rakes, piano

Friday, May 3, 1991, 6:00 p.m.
Hughes Hall Auditorium

THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON:
A LECTURE RECITAL

I taste a liquor never brewed (1975) John Duke

I’m Nobody (1957) Vincent Persichetti
I’m nobody (1966) Robert Baksa

Heart! We will forget him! (1978) John Duke
Heart, we will forget him (1949/50) Aaron Copland

INTERMISSION

Good Morning, Midnight! (1936) Arthur Farwell
Good morning, Midnight (1978) John Duke

New feet within my garden go (1975) John Duke

There came a wind like a bugle (1949/50) Aaron Copland
There Came a Wind Like a Bugle (1987) Lee Hoiby
RE bâtal III

Anne Foradori, soprano
Robin Rakes, piano

Tuesday, April 6, 1993, 8:00 p.m.
Weigel Hall Auditorium

PROGRAM

On this Island, op.11
Let the Florid Music Praise!
Now the Leaves are Falling Fast
Seascape
Nocturne
As it is, Plenty

Juchhe!, op.6, no.4
Dein blaues Auge, op.59, no.8
O wusst ich doch den Weg, o.63, no.8
Die Mainacht, op.43, no.2
Vergebliches Ständchen, op.84, no.4

INTERMISSION

"Son pochi fiori" from L'Amico Fritz
"Suzel, buon di" (duet) from L'Amico Fritz

JR Fralick, tenor

Nye poi krasavitsa!, op.4, no.4
Sumyerki, op.21, no.3
Vye syenniye vody, op.14, no.11

Sergei Rakhmaninov
(1873-1943)
RECITAL IV

Anne Foradori, soprano
Robin Rakes, piano

assisted by
Leslie Goldman Maaser, flute
Melanie Richards, clarinet
Debra Burt and Melissa Stevens, oboe
Kate Bill, mezzo-soprano
JR Fralick, tenor

Thursday, May 19, 1994, 8:00 p.m.
Weigel Hall Auditorium

PROGRAM

"Ich folge dir gleichfalls"
from St. John Passion

"Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben"
from St. Matthew Passion

Deux Poemes de Ronsard
   Rossignol, mon mignon...
   Ciel, aer et vent...

As it Fell Upon a Day

The Mad Maid's Song

INTERMISSION

"Ah guarda sorella"
from Cosi fan Tutte
   Kate Bill, mezzo-soprano

"Birdie's Aria"
from Regina

"Toi! Vous!" (St. Sulpice scene)
from Manon
   JR Fralick, tenor

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
Albert Roussel (1869-1937)
Aaron Copland (1900-1990)
David Diamond (b. 1915)
W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)
Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964)
Jules Massenet (1842-1912)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>mm. 20-23, p. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>mm. 7-10, p. 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>mm. 1-2, p. 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>mm. 11-13, p. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>mm. 1-4, p. 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>mm. 10-14, p. 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>mm. 6-12, p. 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>mm. 4-7, p. 177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>mm. 6-7, p. 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>mm. 4-7, p. 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>mm. 19-28, p. 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>mm. 14-19, p. 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>mm. 1-10, p. 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>mm. 1-9, p. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>mm. 11-17, p. 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>mm. 8-11, p. 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>mm. 4-6, p. 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>mm. 1-8, p. 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>mm. 9-14, p. 236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>mm. 1-5, p. 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>mm. 1-4, p. 248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>mm. 6-13, p. 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>mm. 7-14, p. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>mm. 8-10, p. 146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>mm. 1-4, p. 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>mm. 10-13, p. 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>mm. 5-9, p. 161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>mm. 10-11, p. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>mm. 7-11, p. 242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>mm. 1-8, p. 172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>mm. 10-18, p. 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>mm. 1-7, p. 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>mm. 12-13, p. 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>mm. 1-4, p. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>mm. 6-7, p. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>mm. 1-9, p. 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>mm. 1-3, p. 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>mm. 7-10, p. 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>mm. 5-8, p. 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>mm. 4-9, p. 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>mm. 5-8, p. 247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American composer Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964) is primarily known for his works for the theatre. The most famous of these is *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), a WPA theatre project which set the Broadway community reeling. A tireless advocate for social change, Blitzstein chose characters and situations which could best illustrate his views, whether they took the form of the working class vs. the establishment in *Cradle* or former slaves vs. aristocratic Southerners in *Regina* (1949).

A student of Rosario Scalero at the Curtis Institute and Nadia Boulanger, Blitzstein did not so much develop a new or original compositional style, as successfully integrate styles. The result is a dynamic mixture of "what works" for each dramatic and musical situation: jazz, gospel and sentimental ballads combined with sprechstimme, recitative and dramatic arias to produce a musical melange which is eclectic and fresh.

Classifying Blitzstein’s music has always presented a challenge to the academic music community. Music historians are often unsure whether to label him as a "popular" musical
theatre composer, grouping him with such song writers as Richard Rodgers and Frederick Loewe or as a composer of "serious" stage music, like his contemporaries Gian Carlo Menotti, Douglas Moore, and Virgil Thomson. This ongoing debate has provided a rich source of dialogue and is one which I will explore in the course of this document.

Opening on October 30, 1949, at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre on Broadway, Regina played only 56 performances; not a long run by Broadway standards, but a healthy number of performances for an individual opera in a season. The work received mixed reviews from theatre critics who did not know what to make of it; and upon learning that it was not another Oklahoma! (1943) or Brigadoon (1947), audiences stayed away in droves.

Certain that Regina was a victim of circumstances, and was perhaps misunderstood as a work ahead of its time, Cheryl Crawford, the show's producer, presented a concert version in 1952 with most of the original cast members. This time the work (which had been revised by Blitzstein), was enthusiastically greeted by music critics. It was revived in 1953, 1958 and 1992 in highly acclaimed productions at New York City Opera, as well as boasting many productions by regional companies in recent years. Regina has found its home--the operatic stage.

Regina is an important work and worthy of investigation on many levels. The score is well-crafted and entertaining,
with a creative use of orchestration and full use of voices, (i.e., sprechstimme, rhythmic speaking, dialogue, etc., in addition to singing). The libretto is adapted from one of the American theatre's best-known plays, Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. Perhaps most importantly, *Regina* marks one of the earliest offerings in a series of Broadway operas/landmark musicals of the mid-century including: *The Consul* (1950), *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (1954), *The Golden Apple* (1954), and *Candide* (1956).

The influence of Kurt Weill's early work is evident in Blitzstein's writings. From the use of popular musical idioms, to libretti which made a strong social commentary, Weill had a lasting impact on the young composer/librettist. Although Weill did not wish to be "typed" as a composer of American operas, his American works such as *Street Scene* (1947) and *Lost in the Stars* (1949) embody the breadth and scope of operatic works, and as such share a special place with *Regina* in the Broadway repertoire.

*Regina* paved the way for many musical theatre composers to write more "bridge" works--musicals with increased vocal and dramatic demands on its performers, such as *Candide* (1956), *West Side Story* (1957), *Man of La Mancha* (1965), *A Little Night Music* (1973), and *Sweeney Todd* (1979).

In this document, I will examine *Regina*--its libretto and score--comparing and contrasting Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* with Blitzstein's adapted libretto. In addition, I will
present some of the more fascinating aspects of Regina's musical score: vocal writing, orchestration, and use of music as dramatic underscoring. Lastly, I will discuss Regina's place in the musical world and its effect on the development of a genre of work known as "Broadway opera."

The resources for a successful examination of Regina are many, although they exist in many different forms, some of which are unpublished. Only one book on Marc Blitzstein exists: Mark the Music: The Life and Works of Marc Blitzstein by Eric A. Gordon, (St. Martin Press, 1989). It is a thorough chronology of his personal and artistic life, but does not examine his music. Likewise, the two PhD dissertations of which Blitzstein's work is the subject, focus on his original libretti, not his music. Many articles generally address his compositional style without delving into any one work. Blitzstein's papers are housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. His notes on Regina are extensive and provide valuable insight into his process of researching, writing, composing, and revising this work, as well as his dealings with Lillian Hellman, Cheryl Crawford and Robert Lewis, and negotiations with publishers and record producers.

Both Robert Lewis and celebrated mezzo-soprano Rosalind Elias (who has both directed Regina and sung the title role), have written about their experiences with Regina. Their insight into this complex work has been invaluable.

I believe that Marc Blitzstein's contribution to the
development of American opera has been overlooked for a number of reasons, but primarily because Blitzstein lacked a true commercial success.¹ This would not appear to be an issue for a composer of "serious" music, but because Blitzstein chose to present his works in a commercial venue--Broadway--the success of his work was largely evaluated on the basis of profit margin and mass appeal. In addition, Blitzstein's use of musical idioms based on the vernacular--pop, jazz, gospel--fit neither the mold of traditional musical theatre nor that of his European-trained contemporaries. His untimely death in 1964 left three unfinished works and many unresolved questions.

Lastly, Regina is a work which has evolved since its premiere in 1949. Several "versions" of the score exist: songs, dialogue and orchestral numbers have appeared, disappeared, and reappeared to accommodate producers' budgets, singers' talents, and perhaps most important, Blitzstein's desire to create a perfect work.

¹. Blitzstein's English translation/adaptation of the Brecht/Weill Threepenny Opera opened on Broadway in 1954 and ran for 95 performances. It reopened in 1955 and enjoyed an enormously successful run of 2600 performances. Although this adaptation was critically acclaimed, none of Blitzstein's own original scores experienced the same commercial success.
Marc Blitzstein was born in Philadelphia on March 2, 1905. The son of a wealthy banker, Blitzstein was afforded every opportunity for early musical training. He began piano studies at three and performed publicly for the first time at the age of seven. He attended Philadelphia public schools and the University of Pennsylvania, where he received a full merit scholarship. In 1921, he was the gold medalist in a Philharmonic Society of Philadelphia contest, leading to a performance as pianist with the Academy of Music orchestra the following season.

In 1924, Blitzstein left the University of Pennsylvania to become one of the first students to enter the newly formed Curtis Institute, where he studied composition with Rosario Scalero. In 1926, he traveled to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger was impressed by his musical abilities and wrote a general letter of recommendation on his behalf:

Having had the musical joy to have Mark [sic] Blitzstein as a pupil for several months, I could not too highly praise his gifts - Born musician, he is especially bright minded - and gives the greatest reasons to believe he is to become a true great artist. What he has already accomplished is of unusual quality.
This said in the most serious and sincere feeling.¹

He left Paris in February 1927 to study with Arnold Schoenberg in Berlin. While in Berlin, Blitzstein was first exposed to Die Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera) of Brecht/Weill and was fascinated by the idea of theatre with a "social conscience."

Blitzstein returned to the U.S. the following year and was a fellow at the McDowell Colony during the summer of 1928. There he worked with fellow aspiring and/or established composers: Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Mrs. H.H.A. Beach and Marion Bauer. He also met novelist Eva Goldbeck, who became his close friend and, eventually, his wife. Marc and Eva shared many interests—literature, music and a deep-rooted belief in Socialist politics.

Blitzstein's first opera was a surrealist piece, Triple Sec (1929). It was later incorporated into the New York Revue the Garrick Gaieties (1930) and was not particularly well received by audiences or critics. During the next four years, Blitzstein spent much of his time traveling between the U.S. and Europe, presenting lecture-recitals on 20th-century music to support himself while he was composing.

In 1935, Blitzstein attended lectures given by Hanns Eisler at the New School of Social Research in New York. These lectures, titled "The Crisis in Music," led him to examine the role of music in society and helped to shape what became the
driving force of his compositions for the next decade: "art for society's sake."

During the same year, Blitzstein was one of the contributors to the show Parade, which was subtitled, "A Social Revue." It was produced by the younger members of The Theatre Guild and starred Eve Arden and Jimmy Savo. Although this politically "left" show received mixed reviews, it underscored Blitzstein's use of theatre and music to explore social and political issues.

The Cradle Will Rock was and still is considered Blitzstein's greatest theatrical triumph. Opening in 1937, the show's history is as stormy and controversial as its subject matter. The Cradle Will Rock was conceived by Blitzstein who also wrote its music, book and lyrics. It was produced by the Federal Theatre Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), with twenty-two year old Orson Welles as director and Welles and John Houseman as the show's producers. Funding was pulled after the show's preview performance "to facilitate budget cuts." In reality, the WPA had become nervous about the controversial subject matter of the show: a union organizer taking on "big business," and members of the establishment "prostituting" themselves and their morals, stepping on the downtrodden in their climb up the ladder of success. As the audience gathered outside the Maxine Elliott Theatre for the sold-out opening, they discovered that they were literally locked out. Actor Will Geer entertained the
audience while Houseman frantically searched for an empty theatre in which to perform. The audience, eight hundred strong, was eventually asked to walk some twenty blocks to the Venice Theatre for the opening night performance which began two hours late. Without sets, costumes or musicians, and under the strict prohibition of participation for members of Actors’ Equity, Blitzstein sat at the piano on an otherwise empty stage and played the score of the show. About half the cast sat in the audience (so as not to appear “on stage”) and performed their parts, Blitzstein filling in and Welles narrating, as needed. The show was an instant success and continued at the Venice for two weeks in this unorthodox but exciting setting. It eventually ran for 104 performances on Broadway in January 1938.

*The Cradle Will Rock* established Blitzstein as a composer for the theatre and strengthened his image as a strong advocate for social justice. He became the resident composer for the Mercury Theatre Company which Welles and Houseman started after *Cradle*.

During the next two years, Blitzstein wrote incidental music for two Mercury Theatre productions: *Julius Caesar* (1937) and Buchner’s *Danton’s Death* (1937). He also wrote the film score for *The Spanish Earth* (1937), a propaganda film on the Spanish Civil War. It was this project that brought Blitzstein and Lillian Hellman together for the first time. Hellman was part of a group, Contemporary Historians, Inc.,
which commissioned the film. In 1938, Blitzstein also joined the Communist Party, a group from which he resigned in 1949.

Blitzstein’s next opera, No for an Answer (1941), was as stormy as Cradle. In The Cradle Will Rock, Blitzstein created caricatures ("Mr. Mister," "Reverend Salvation," "Larry Foreman," etc.), to illustrate his points; but in No For An Answer, he attempted to create realistic characters in a contemporary setting. Although the show received critical acclaim, it failed to attract backers for a commercial run because of its controversial subject matter--striking hotel workers--and received only three performances through the support of a small group from the theatrical community, which included Lillian Hellman. During this time, Blitzstein composed scores for two more movies: Valley Town (1941), a study of unemployment, and Native Land (1942), "a full-length portrayal of fascist tendencies in corporate America."²

Like thousands of other Americans, Blitzstein enlisted in the service during World War II. He served from 1942-1945 with the 8th Air Force in London as Director of Music for the American Broadcasting Station in Europe. During this time he wrote a symphonic work, Freedom Morning (1943) and The Airborne Symphony (1944), commissioned by the Army. The latter was a work for orchestra, men’s chorus, tenor and baritone soloists, and narrator. Never missing an opportunity for social commentary, The Airborne Symphony’s subject is the history of flight--from Icarus, to the Wright Brothers, to war
planes--bombs, death and destruction. The narrator's voice (called the "Monitor" by Blitzstein) acts as a tolling bell, charging man to remember that with power and knowledge comes responsibility. His repeated cry: "Warning!" is etched dramatically into the memory of the listener. Not surprisingly, the work which was probably not what the Army had envisioned, was not performed until after the war.

Stateside once again, Blitzstein returned to writing for the theatre, composing incidental music for Lillian Hellman's *Another Part of the Forest* (1946) and the American Repertory Theatre (ART) production of Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* (1946). It was through his association with ART that Blitzstein first worked with Cheryl Crawford, one of the show's producers. In 1946, Blitzstein received a major commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation to compose an opera. He chose Hellman's play *The Little Foxes* for a musical setting, to be titled *Regina*.

After *Regina* (1949), Blitzstein translated and adapted the Brecht/Weill *Die Dreigroschenoper*. It opened off-Broadway in 1954, starring Lotte Lenya, and enjoyed a long and successful run.

Blitzstein's other two musical plays, *Reuben, Reuben* (1955) and *Juno* (1959), did not receive the critical acclaim of other productions. *Reuben, Reuben* teamed director Robert Lewis and producer Cheryl Crawford (who respectively had directed and produced the Broadway production of *Regina*) with
the acting/singing talents of Eddie Albert, Kaye Ballard and Evelyn Lear. Many critics viewed an overall lack of focus and direction as one of the show's chief faults. Although the musical score was original and innovative, the weak book and apparent artistic conflicts between Blitzstein and director Lewis brought the show to a pre-Broadway closing during the Boston tryout tour.

Juno, a musical adaptation of Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock, received a short (16 performance) Broadway run. A weak book by Joseph Stein and miscast leads, Shirley Booth and Melvyn Douglas, were cited by many as reasons for the show's quick demise. There are some splendid musical moments in Juno. The score is full of lush and sentimental melodies, which tug at the heart strings.

In 1960, Blitzstein composed his last score of incidental music for Hellman's Toys in the Attic. It was his fourth association with the playwright.

At the time of his death, Blitzstein was working on a score for the Metropolitan Opera Association through a Ford Foundation grant. The subject of this three-act opera was Sacco and Vanzetti. Two one-act operas, Idiots First and The Magic Barrel, based on short stories by Bernard Malamud, also remained unfinished.

In addition to his stage works, Blitzstein composed incidental music for productions of plays by Shakespeare, nine film scores, and many instrumental pieces. Several songs,
mostly to texts by Walt Whitman and e.e. cummings, span his career. As his music was performed in a variety of settings (many of which involved a "select" audience) his work did not always receive the notoriety enjoyed by his contemporaries.

Blitzstein received two Guggenheim Fellowships and commissions for operas from the Koussevitzky and Ford Foundations. He became a member of the National Association of Arts and Letters in 1959. Blitzstein's writings include contributions to Modern Music, the Music Quarterly, and Theatre Arts.

Popular and classical music historians, alike, acknowledge Blitzstein's talent and drive, but many cite his desire to choose controversial subjects and work "outside the system" of Broadway musical theatre and/or serious composition as a reason for his limited notoriety:

Marc Blitzstein’s strong commitment and uncompromising artistic viewpoint work[ed] against popular success; surprisingly, his scores usually received the highly enthusiastic reviews they deserved. His one commercial project was the labor-of-love adaptation of the work of another composer [Weill's Threepenny Opera]; his own work and name are virtually unknown. But Blitzstein's contributions to the serious musical theatre are of great importance, and point in a direction which had not yet been fully realized.3


Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes

Lillian Hellman's play, *The Little Foxes*, opened on Broadway on February 15, 1939. It was the third Broadway show for this New Orleans native and was an overnight sensation. Even those who thought it overly melodramatic acknowledged its impact: it is an intense and powerful drama with characters who are unrelentingly vicious.

In the manner of Ibsen, O'Neill, Chekhov and other realistic playwrights, Hellman explored contemporary social issues in her work. "Scoundrels tend to prevail in Hellman's plays because she detests sentimentality and therefore avoids the last-minute conversions of villains so dear to the hearts of genuinely well-made dramatists."¹

Her first play, *The Children's Hour*, examined both lesbianism and child abuse. In *The Little Foxes*, Hellman presents a family consumed by greed and avarice, corrupted by a lust for money and power—and those who would "stand in their way" meet their demise: one dies, another is literally and figuratively beaten into compliance.
Hellman created perhaps her most vivid character in Regina. She is smart, good-looking and funny - all winning attributes in a heroine.²

But, Regina is not a heroine, and audiences were both confused and curious that the characters in this work should be so devoid of social conscience or moral outrage. The play does have its lighter moments, as the villains try to outwit one another with their scheming and conniving:

Regina Giddens feigns the role of the inept and demure Southern belle in a character study that is, in words Hellman once used to describe Dorothy Parker, a combination of Little Nell and Lady Macbeth.³

Hellman is a good story-teller. The plot of The Little Foxes, albeit complicated, is clearly and entertainingly told. In it, the playwright uses what she referred to as "'tricks' of the theatre - strong curtains, overheard conversations, the employment of blackmail and such props as Horace's bottle of medicine and safety deposit box...to propel dramatic action."⁴

Plot synopsis of The Little Foxes

The play is set in three acts, and the action takes place in the living room of the Giddens' home in a small town in the South. The time is the spring of 1900.

In the opening scene, Addie and Cal, two black servants in the household are arranging an afterdinner bottle of port and glasses. Almost immediately, the party arrives from the dining room: Regina Giddens, her daughter Alexandra, brothers
Ben and Oscar Hubbard, Oscar's wife Birdie and son Leo and Mr. Marshall, an industrialist and their honored guest from Chicago. As the scene progresses, the relationships of these characters become more evident—the money-grubbing Hubbard brothers; charming but ruthless Regina; sad and neglected Birdie; innocent Alexandra (Zan), and Leo, the lazy manipulator who is following in his father's footsteps. The brothers are closing an important business deal with Marshall who departs shortly thereafter. Upon his departure, Regina and her brothers plot and scheme how they will make and spend their millions. They are awakened from their dream of being "big rich" by Ben who wants to finalize the plans for raising the investment capital. Ben and Oscar have secured their portions and it is only Regina, whose husband Horace is ill at Johns Hopkins and has not answered her letters about the deal, who must come up with her share of the downpayment. Regina pretends that Horace is "holding out" for a larger share of the profits in order to secure them for herself. Ben and Regina decide that the "extra" money will come from Oscar's portion, much to his dismay; but Ben suggests that the money might remain in the family by arranging a marriage between Zan and Leo—much to Oscar's delight, Birdie's horror and Regina's indifference. Regina devises a scheme in which Alexandra will travel by train to Baltimore and bring Horace home from the hospital. Regina is certain that she can convince Horace to invest, once he is home. Zan and Leo arrive from taking
Marshall to the train station and Zan learns of her travel arrangements. As Regina goes upstairs to pack Zan's things and everyone is departing, a frantic Birdie tries to pull Zan aside and warn her of the plan for her to marry Leo. Oscar overhears this and as he angrily whisks Birdie out of the house, he slaps her face hard.

Act Two takes place one week later. It is morning, and Oscar and Leo have arrived to await the now-overdue arrival of Horace and Zan. In the ensuing conversation Leo reveals that he has opened his Uncle Horace's safe deposit box, stored at the bank where he works. He divulges its contents which include eighty-eight thousand dollars worth of bonds. He adds casually that his uncle only looks in the box twice a year. Oscar makes note of that information for future reference. Ben arrives and Regina comes downstairs. All four wonder about the whereabouts of Zan and Horace for a moment and retire to the dining room for breakfast. Shortly thereafter, Horace and Alexandra arrive. Zan is excited and protective of her father, who is obviously ill with heart trouble and walks with great effort. She makes a special point of explaining his medicine and its importance to Addie. Addie helps them in, gets Horace settled in his wheelchair, and sends Zan upstairs to get washed up after the long train trip. Addie fills Horace in on the news including the plans for Alexandra and Leo's marriage. Addie announces their return and there is a rush of "wellwishers" from the dining room.
Leo swarm about Horace assuring him that he does indeed look well. Birdie arrives (she has rushed over in her dressing-gown), and is happy to see Horace. After a brief argument, "just like old times," Regina and Horace are left alone. It is then that the sordid details of their failed marriage are revealed: Horace's "fancy women" and Regina's sexual rejection of her husband. At Regina's insistence, Ben and Oscar return from the dining room to explain the business deal to Horace who is exhausted and only wants to rest. Regina tries to "sweeten" the deal by telling Horace that they will reap more than one third of the profits. Upon discovering that the "extra" will come from Oscar's share, Horace is finally able to put all the pieces of the puzzle together: Regina and Ben cheat Oscar, who will get his money back through the marriage of Leo and Zan. Further, their profits will be even larger because of the cheap labor--ex-slaves and poor whites desperate for work, will once again be victims of the unscrupulous Hubbard brothers. Horace has had enough of the lies, conniving and deception, and decides that he and Regina won't be part of the deal. As he starts up the stairs to rest, Regina follows him, hounding him every step of the way for an explanation. Ben, Oscar, and Leo are left to their own devices. Oscar suggests that perhaps Horace might become an unknowing partner through a "loan" of the bonds which Leo will "borrow." Without wanting to know details of the scheme, Ben agrees. Zan comes downstairs pleading with Ben to intervene in
Regina and Horace's argument which has become increasingly loud and violent. The fight ends with a slamming door and Regina appears on the staircase only to learn from Ben that "everything is settled" and they don't need her money after all. Horace overhears the conversation and comments from the stairs: "It's a great day when you and Ben cross swords." Regina flies at him in a rage, saying: "I hope you die soon. I'll be waiting!"

Act Three takes place two weeks later; it is late afternoon and raining. Horace sits in his wheelchair. A safe deposit box and a small bottle of medicine are on the table next to him. Birdie and Zan are playing the piano and Addie comes in with tea cakes and elderberry wine. As they reminisce about old times, Birdie gets tipsy. At first she is happy and then becomes terribly sad as she tells of her plight: a loveless marriage, a son whom she doesn't like, and finally, her desperate loneliness and drinking. As she breaks down, Zan comforts her and offers to walk her home. Horace and Addie are left alone. Horace reveals that he has written a new will and has put aside money for Addie to take Zan away when he dies. He calls Cal in and instructs him to thank Mr. Manders at the bank, for bringing the safe deposit box over to him. This is to frighten Leo. Regina returns. She and Horace have not spoken since their argument. Horace informs her that Leo has stolen the bonds for the extra money in the Marshall deal. At first, Regina does not believe him, then expresses
her delight in a plan to "hold this over their heads." Horace

tells Regina of the revised will and that in it, it will
appear that Regina has "loaned" the bonds (now, her only
portion of the estate) to her brothers. He adds that she
cannot do anything about it, "as long as he lives." She
repeats, "as long as you live," as if she has had a
revelation. Regina begins to taunt Horace in a slow and
calculated manner, telling him that she never loved him and
never wanted him in bed. Horace is overwrought and begins to
clutch his throat, as he is having an attack. He begs Regina
to get the medicine on the table. She does not move and as
Horace pours the medicine, he drops the bottle which smashes.
He pleads with Regina to help, but as she remains motionless,
it becomes evident to Horace that Regina wants him to die. In
a weak and desperate voice, he cries for help and tries to get
up the stairs, but falters and collapses. When she is sure
that he is motionless, Regina calls Horace's name. When there
is no response, she calls for Addie and Cal in a feigned
frantic voice for help. They get Horace upstairs and send for
a doctor. Zan arrives home, discovers what has happened and
goes upstairs. There is confusion as Leo arrives nervously
(he knows that Horace has seen the box with the missing
bonds), looking for Oscar and Ben. Soon the brothers enter,
having heard of Horace's attack. Leo informs them about the
box and the three plot quickly to devise a story about the
bonds. Regina comes downstairs and informs them that Horace's
condition is serious. She also divulges that she and Horace know about the stolen bonds, and of Horace's plan to say they were a loan from Regina. Regina says that if Horace dies, she will want seventy-five percent of the profits, or she will prosecute them for the theft. Their hands are tied, as they agree that neither of them has known Regina "well enough." Zan and Addie come downstairs slowly. Horace has died. Zan is upset and asks Oscar, Ben, and Regina if any of them ever loved Horace. Regina dismisses Zan, telling her she is upset and tired and that she should go upstairs. Zan wants to talk to her mother and decides to wait. Regina "finishes her business" with her brothers, instructing them to draw up the necessary papers for the new division of the profits. As they finish, Zan asks Regina what a man with a heart condition was doing on the staircase. Ben and Oscar leave and Regina tells Zan that they will move to Chicago. Alexandra says that she won't go with Regina because Horace wouldn't want it. Regina admires Zan's spirit and asks her whether she would like to sleep with her tonight. Zan answers, "Are you afraid, Mama?" Regina does not answer her, but starts up the stairs, as Addie, smiling, begins to dim the lights. Curtain.

In her memoirs, Hellman acknowledged a "distant connection" between the Hubbards and her mother's rich relatives, the Marxes and Newhouses, but added:

...that she had softened somewhat the character of her central figure, Regina. Because the husband of the real-life prototype had had syphilis, she had banished him to an
outbuilding on the pretext that he might infect the children. In earlier drafts, Hellman incorporated the syphilis and the banishment, but later changed the husband's ailment to heart trouble and moved him into the main house.\textsuperscript{5}

Hellman believed that it was not her place to develop opinions about her characters:

You have no right to see your characters as good or bad. Such words have nothing to do with people you write about. Other people see them that way.\textsuperscript{6}

She was, however, often surprised at audience reactions to her characters:

I meant for her [Alexandra] to leave. But to my great surprise, the ending of the play was taken to be a statement of faith in Alexandra, in her denial of her family. I never meant it that way. She did have courage enough to leave, but she would never have the force or vigor of her mother's family. That's what I meant."\textsuperscript{7}

Perhaps the most frequent criticism of The Little Foxes (but indeed what makes it an ideal candidate for a musical setting) is its overwhelming embrace of the melodramatic:

...[an] interesting distinction is made between serious theater and melodrama when the term 'serious' is reserved for plays in which the events lead the characters, and by extension the audience, into deeper understanding of the world or of themselves. In this, The Little Foxes falls down. There is almost no introspection on the Hubbards' part, nor does the author reveal much dimension in them other than the depth of their corruption.\textsuperscript{8}

Blitzstein first approached Hellman about setting The Little Foxes to music in 1946. The two had already worked
together on the film *The Spanish Earth*, a documentary on the Spanish Civil War for which Blitzstein wrote the score. Hellman had served on the committee which organized the project. Later, Blitzstein would write incidental music for two of Hellman's plays, *Another Part of the Forest* (1947), the "prequel" to *The Little Foxes*, and *Toys in the Attic* (1960).

Hellman was fiercely protective of her work and although she agreed to the project, she could not imagine the story of the Hubbards set to music. Blitzstein was to serve as the opera's librettist, but Hellman kept close watch on the project, providing on several occasions a detailed critique of Blitzstein's text:

Regina speaks of fritters. Fritters are wrong. They aren't eaten at a fancy Southern dinner..."Swanee River" [referring to lyrics of 'Sing Hubbard'] is very wrong for our part of the land..."

In fact, the "version" of *Regina* which Lillian Hellman was most satisfied with was the one which contained the least dialogue and came closest to simply setting her text to music. Hellman continued to make suggestions/comments to Blitzstein well into the final writing stages; but, as the production approached, Blitzstein began to take the suggestions "under advisement," incorporating them only as he saw vital to the plot or the integrity of Hellman's play.

Hellman's relationship with *Regina* was peculiar. On one hand, she wrote detailed notes to Blitzstein, time and time again, about word/phrase changes, opinions about the length of
scenes, etc., and was quite supportive in a private way:

Your phone call interrupted this [note writing] which would have gone on to tell you that it is a job of true stature and true bigness and that I am grateful for it beyond the words I have to tell you. Please do not be disturbed. Please be happy and very proud of yourself.¹⁰

Yet, publicly, Hellman seemed reticent to give the work a full vote of approval:

[in an interview, some years later]...Marc and I were close friends but we never collaborated. I had nothing to do with the opera.¹¹

I had never seen music in The Little Foxes, never thought of it that way. And so, a long time ago, when Marc Blitzstein said he wanted to make an opera of the play, I don’t know, or I don’t remember, why I said yes. Like most writers, I don’t like very much to have my work touched by anybody else; and the play was far behind me and I didn’t want to think about it anymore...when a friend told me that Birdie’s third act confession scene was more touching with music than it had been without music, I was a little jealous. I suppose most of us don’t like to hear that you’ve been improved upon.¹²

Blitzstein’s Libretto

Writing text was nothing new for Marc Blitzstein. He had served as his own librettist in his earlier works for the stage, including the powerful and controversial The Cradle Will Rock. Adapting another’s work, especially one which had been so well-received in its original form, was a challenge. As soon as Blitzstein secured approval from Hellman, he began work on the project in the summer of 1946.
Blitzstein began by examining Hellman's play: what were the underlying themes, and which ones did Blitzstein want to use, embellish or discard?

What is the abiding atmosphere of this play? The possibilities of music-painting, I mean? Well, it's "Natchez" (a name I've used in my mind's eye to mean the "flower" of the Old South gone to seed), beside it the industrial minded South... It's the "darkies", the soft-spoken resigned ones, and the up-and-coming young ones whose first voice is to be found in the New Orleans jazz period.  

In these early notes on Regina, Blitzstein decided that Dixieland jazz would figure importantly in his musical score. He also chose to add a ball scene for Regina in the second act through which Blitzstein could develop, as he said: "the relation of the townspeople to the Hubbard family; their ass-licking and snobbery." This scene also provided an opportunity for expanded musical writing, dances of the period, and the introduction of the chorus. Blitzstein even entertained the idea of incorporating "a long-forgotten love affair [between Birdie and Horace] which Birdie still treasures," but, decided that that was "adding too much to Lillian's plot-line."

In his earlier stage works, Blitzstein took every opportunity to develop story lines which dealt with conflicts between classes and races. Likewise, in Regina, Blitzstein highlighted the relationships between old aristocracy (Birdie's family) and the rising mercantile-class (the Hubbards), as well as blacks (now free, but still "slaves" in
an old socio-econmonic system) and whites (ex-slave owners who
still controlled all). Perhaps it was his way of reinforcing
his belief that social inequities exist, regardless of time
and location.

To develop plausible conversation for characters in the
ball scene, Blitzstein researched the "social scene" in turn-
of-the-century America. He made detailed notes of everything
pertinent: resorts, stylish hotels, who's who in society,
social events of the season, financial mogels and even which
dogs were "en vogue". Although most of this information was
not incorporated into the dialogue, Blitzstein thought it was
important to "know" the people for whom and about whom he was
writing. In this instance, native southern Lillian Hellman
seemed to be at a decided advantage over Philadelphian
Blitzstein.

Blitzstein made three major structural changes to
Hellman's The Little Foxes. He added a Prologue to the drama.
In it, he introduced the character "Jabez" ("Jazz") and his
"Angel Band," a group of young black men: ragtag Dixieland
musicians. The Prologue was originally conceived to be an
extensive opening scene in the shanty district incorporating
dialogue, singing and Dixieland jazz:

...the curtain goes up in silence; we see the
set, and hear voices speaking in ordinary
dialogue, so that it appears we may be about
to see a play, not an opera. Then the languid,
easy, sun-drenched C Major music, as Cal
drives Zan and Addie on-stage in the buggy.
The young colored boy, relative of Cal's who
is made to do a chore, although he has said "Goin' fishin'", when they ask him his plans. They will give him some fish for his family's dinner as compensation for the chore (bring in the chronic hungriness of the colored people here); but of course he wants the fun of catching his own fish. Then we hear, through the window of one of the shanties, the practising of the jazzband..."\textsuperscript{15}

The scene was written in a much shorter and less elaborate form in which the Angel Band began to play their song "Naught's a Naught," a jazzy partner song to "Angel Band," a spiritual which Addie and Cal are singing. Soon Zan joins them, and as the music swells, it is cut-off by Regina. The overture would follow. Although this scene was retained in the production, the dialogue was cut and it was trimmed severely because of time constraints (and perhaps the objections of a very vocal Lillian Hellman).

Blitzstein also added a ballroom scene in the beginning of Act Two. Many incidental characters, some of whom had dialogue, were added to Hellman's original play. These party guests, all of whom had names, functioned as the chorus. The Dixieland band (named characters) played, as well as a small society orchestra (nameless) which Regina had hired from Mobile. This extensive scene was eventually drastically cut when producer Cheryl Crawford insisted the production be trimmed from three to two acts. The dance music and most of the dialogue were eliminated.

The third addition was a scene for Horace's funeral. Blitzstein had originally conceived it to be quite elaborate:
...in the funeral scene: the boys get het-up as they are playing the funeral music, and find themselves ragging it, especially as Jazz eggs them on with the reminder that now they can all go to New Orleans. Regina commands them to stop (sacrilege, etc.) but Zan saying that Horace would have liked it, overrides her, ordering them to continue.16

When the show was ultimately produced, there was no funeral scene, but some onstage dialogue between Zan and Regina, with Jazz and others singing offstage. Blitzstein referred to the opening and final scenes as a Prologue and Epilogue to the opera, juxtaposing the use of the Dixieland band and the orchestra to form a strong contrast, not only of musical styles, but between characters—ex-slaves and ex-slaveowners (the Angel Band and Regina) in the Prologue, and daughter and mother (Zan and Regina) in the Epilogue. Blitzstein liked the shift in power at the end of the drama, from the villainous to the righteous. The use of Dixieland music in the beginning and end provided the work with a sense of musical and dramatic symmetry.

One of the most interesting changes which Blitzstein made was the addition of John Bagtry to the ball scene. Bagtry did not appear in The Little Foxes, but was a major character in Another Part of the Forest, Hellman's prequel to The Little Foxes. He is depicted as "an old beau" of Regina's whom she invites to the ball to make Horace jealous. In first drafts, he appears more on stage and dialogue between Regina and Bagtry helps to establish their past relationship. As the
scene was edited to accommodate the shift from three acts to two, Bagtry’s part is made quite small and his impact as a character (i.e., a rival for Horace), is diminished to the point where he is superfluous to the plot. Regina’s relationship with Bagtry in *Regina* is strangely cold and impersonal, especially since they appear as ardent lovers in *Another Part of the Forest*. Perhaps Blitzstein wanted to illustrate that Regina had hardened over the years.

There are significant differences between Blitzstein and Hellman’s approaches to dialogue and characterizations. While most of Hellman’s complaints arose from language which she considered "unsouthern" or inappropriate for a specific character, her major objection to Blitzstein’s text was his treatment of blacks:

>I still feel the whole approach to the Negro in the play, whether it is the jazz band, or Jabez’s singing to Birdie, or the Negroes at the party, is sentimental. I think the original play already had too much sentimentality and it was an artistic mistake. But I don’t think we should increase the mistake.¹⁷

Blitzstein wrote additional dialogue for the black servants and created the Angel Band. In the song, "Blues," which was originally to be sung by Jazz, but was later reassigned to Addie, and in Addie’s relationship with Zan, Blitzstein incorporates a warmth and depth of character for the servants, not found in Hellman’s original drama. Also, Hellman uses the word "nigger" liberally in her dialogue. Perhaps as a southerner writing dialogue for southern
characters, she felt this was appropriate and realistic. It seemed to strike a note of discord with the socialist sensibilities of Blitzstein, however, and he used the word only once in the first scene, as Jazz sings: "Naught's a naught, figger's a figger. All for the white man, and none for the nigger." He sings the word with the same disdain with which Blitzstein wrote it.

In the first scene, Blitzstein uses a partial "freeze" onstage, during which characters comment on themselves and others in an "aside." Likewise, the chorus gossips about Regina and her brothers, in her home, during the ball scene. It is a theatrical device which Blitzstein used, perhaps to let the audience know that the Hubbards are up to no good; that they are deceitful and cunning hypocrites, even when they appear sincere. Hellman did not like Blitzstein's abstract use of dialogue:

I have already explained why I think the ensemble beginning "The company having the table quit" is a mistake. I cannot urge you strongly enough to take out these ensemble comments. To me they are a complete confusion of methods.18

Blitzstein was equally adamant that these asides remain in his score, as he made note in reference to Hellman's comments:

She [Hellman] has maintained (in her original) the picture of her characters and situations through what they do, what they say, what happens; not through the author's or anybody else's comment about them. She is "shocked" that I don't see the discrepancy in style and form of a totally "realistic" work with
"commentary" decorations... She will not let "anybody" mess up her work like that. Characters may not step aside, and view themselves or each other for the benefit of the audience, in an editorializing way.19

"Blitzstein the librettist" often struggles with "Blitzstein the lyricist." As a librettist, he clearly attempts to incorporate as much of Hellman's original dialogue as possible; but as a lyricist, Blitzstein cannot help but employ the clever rhymes and stinging sarcasm for which he was already known. The result is a complicated melange of southern-Hellman and New-York-Blitzstein. This is especially evident in the "Sing Hubbard" number in Act Two (against which Hellman strongly protested):

...We foot the bill, so swill right hearty.
A bang-up party, and quaint withal...
...What became of dignity, and true gentility?
But we've just sighed and pocketed our pride,
and sold it down the river - Dixie!...

Hellman believed that many of the lyrics which Blitzstein used were too "modern" or "unsouthern":

...the words "pinch" and "cram" seem to me very unsouthern...And in the same speech you have written "secre-terry". I know you did it for the rhyme but it is very, very unsouthern...Southland is a Northland word...Please don't accent words like "cee-gars." I never heard it done in the South.20

As a self-appointed expert on southern speech and colloquialisms, Hellman made a difficult task nearly impossible for Blitzstein. In truth, I believe that Hellman did not want Blitzstein to change her text and did not wish to appear ungracious about it, after lending her support to the
project, so she made her objections under the guise of "southern authority." Eventually, Blitzstein and Hellman came to an understanding, if not a truce about changes:

...And we agreed not to make great slashes or truncations now, in the light of this session, except where I feel absolutely on secure ground for myself. Instead, I'll let the whole thing percolate through my inspection of the score and script, keeping her points of view in mind. She agrees that she ought to see a run-through, as she admits that, even with a complete script in her hand, and a hearing of the whole work from beginning to end (which she has never experienced), she is not able to visualize the whole or continuous effect.21

Many substantial cuts which were made before Regina opened on Broadway in 1949, and in subsequent revivals, are in the dialogue, Hellman's dialogue. As a result, some of the plotting is muddied and confusing; and some characters, such as John Bagtry and Ben, lose some of their weight. Additional dialogue meant additional length to the show, however, and there was enough concern and pressure from Cheryl Crawford and Lillian Hellman to be an effective voice in the shaping of Regina.

Lillian Hellman approached her playwriting with the same passion, vigor and controversy which imbued Blitzstein's scores and libretti. And so it is not surprising, that this volatile duo, drawn together by talent, common beliefs and circumstance should experience such angst and triumph in creating Regina.

Blitzstein reflected on this through an article he wrote on the future of American musical theatre, for Theatre Arts,
some months after *Regina* closed:

To conclude: all roads seem to be converging upon the new musical theatre: song-writing, lyric-and-script-making, choreography, all the other ingredients. I think the two most crucial things are the advent of the "serious" composer upon the scene, and the emphasis upon drama-clear, communication, right in the audience's lap.\(^{22}\)

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4. Estrin, 6.

5. Wright, 146.


7. Ibid., 232.

8. Wright, 152.


10. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


CHAPTER III

REGINA--ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL SCORE

The Concept

Music of sweetness and light, honeysuckle, shortenin' bread and corn pone, and the gay and gallant chivalry of the Old South. Music which will put the economic-royalist stamp on the sentimental escapist love-and-thunder music of the early 20th century...the real thing of the negroes, young jazz, must therefore have a purity and a life that shows up vs. the music of the Hubbards.¹

As Marc Blitzstein wrote his first thoughts about the music for Regina, it was evident that he wanted to make a statement with this work--musical, social, political. The piece was to be full of contrast and conflict, incorporating many musical styles, unusual instrumentation, and a wide spectrum of vocal effects.

Through his work, which up to this point included scores for three films and incidental music for four plays, Blitzstein knew how effective and powerful music could be in establishing and conveying an overall mood of a piece, and how it could support text. He knew that "setting the scene" musically would be vital to the life of Regina:

Regina's [vocal] line must start ultra-sweet, and get more exposed; i.e., more vulgar, more
bitter, more cruel and ugly...²

Birdie's scene with Zan (end of Act I) should be a real aria - terrified, full of irrepres-sible yearning and pain...³

As Blitzstein began to mold Regina, he was mindful of the elements which he believed "were missing in the play (in terms of the typical musical): spectacle; love-romance; humor, 'laughs'; and action, melodrama." He immediately sought out possible solutions by incorporating a chorus and onstage musicians for spectacle, or what Blitzstein referred to as "production." He decided that since there was really no romance in the plot, that Regina's "glamour" would suffice. Humor would be written in for Jazz and the Angel Band, Leo, (as a sort of fool) and Cal. Blitzstein even entertained the idea of involving Leo in a fight, perhaps at the ball as "action."

Blitzstein's concept of the Angel Band was established in early writing, including names and instruments for each member:

- guitar-banjo - Jabez Hoxie (Jazz)
- clarinet - Rucker Hoxie
- cornet-trumpet - Lias Williams
- trombone - Sebastian Trigg (Bas)
- washboard, kazoo, musical saw, drums - Adam Reddix

As he developed the ball scene, Blitzstein added a "society orchestra," which Regina hired from Mobile. It would consist of a string quartet, piano, and "discreet percussion." Musicians from the pit would double in this capacity. In the version published by Chappell, the score calls for a chamber
trio: "lady pianist," violinist, and cellist.

The tradition of "onstage"/"offstage" musicians or an actor/musician playing the role of a musician in opera had been well-established by earlier opera composers, particularly Verdi, who incorporated offstage ensembles in a host of operas. Likewise, Wagner used onstage musicians in Tannhäuser and Puccini's famous "humming chorus" from Madama Butterfly is sung offstage. Richard Strauss created the roles of "the composer" in Ariadne auf Naxos and the "Italian Tenor" in Der Rosenkavalier; and in a more recent work, Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines (1975) by Jack Beeson, the leading lady is an opera singer. Such devices add interest and diversity to a musical score. Blitzstein sought to use these, not so much to "follow in the footsteps" of great operatic composers, but as a means to an end--to mix and match musical styles and orchestral colors, and to surround the action with sound from onstage, offstage, and the pit.

Blitzstein's original score included popular dances in the ball scene: polka, waltz (which Regina sings) and a gallop. In addition, the ball scene is introduced by a number called "Gottschalk," incidental music written to underscore Regina's monologue--to be played by the 'society orchestra' "in the style of Louis Moreau Gottschalk."

In the tradition of Broadway musicals and "number operas," Blitzstein composed several "set pieces," written to be the most musically memorable, and have, perhaps, the
greatest commerical value. To foster popular appeal, several of the show's "songs" were released before Regina opened on Broadway:

Chappell published six songs in advance of the premiere: Regina's "Summer Day" and "The Best Thing of All", Ben's "Greedy Girl", the Chinkypin minstrel, "Blues" and Zan's ballad "What Will It Be?"

As the score for Regina began to take shape and look less and less like a traditional Broadway show, Blitzstein struggled with the idea of writing set pieces, just for the sake of having them in the show:

Cheryl [Crawford] wants (she doesn't say so) more numbers. The way she cottons to Chinkypin, the way she wants to know if there are any more "songs", as distinct from arias, proves that. Don't give in, except where it seems right - but there are several places where it does not seem that.

Vocal Writing

The vocal writing in Regina combines many styles and techniques: singing, rhythmic speaking, scat/jazz, recitative and dramatic arias. Serving as his own lyricist allowed Blitzstein to set text in a most vernacular and uncluttered way. As a result, the words and music became a tightly woven dramatic tapestry. Blitzstein often used contrasts in his text setting:

...tune and words are expected to be identical in mood. But I have in certain cases had fine success in counterpointing them, with the music supplying a deeper and maybe subtler comment on the words, or vice versa.
Regina, perhaps the opera's greediest villain, sings a lush and romantic waltz to a text that cuts to the quick:

I'm no simpering saint with wings, to whom Vacuous Virtue clings. I don't mind handling money - handfuls of money. Money means things, and the things I can do with things.

Vocal writing includes singing and speaking in the same phrase:

![Musical notation for Fig. 1 mm. 20-23, p.12](image)

![Musical notation for Fig. 2 mm. 7-10, p. 84](image)
This technique is effective either when used in a single character's line or in a conversation between characters, where one sings and the other speaks:

\[\text{Fig. 3 mm. 1-2, p. 58}\]

Several characters "vocalize," singing "la" or another nonsensical syllable. The vocalizing is done to serve a variety of purposes. In Act I, Birdie speaks of vocalizing which is done in singing:

\[\text{Fig. 4 mm. 11-13, p. 16}\]
As he prepares for the party, Leo sings to himself about himself:

Doppio (d': d pren.) Allegretto (scherz.)

Doodle doodle, doodle doodle doodle, Love a party, I love a party.

Fig. 5 mm. 1-4, p. 83

Satisfied with the arrangements of a business deal, Ben sings smugly as he exits in Act I. This underscores dialogue:

Fig. 6 mm. 10-14, p. 70
as does Addie's lament for Horace after his death:

![Sheet Music](image)

Fig. 7 mm. 6-12, p. 233

Perhaps the best example of vocalizing is in the "Rain Quartet" at the beginning of Act III in which Zan, Birdie, Addie and Horace's vocalizing provides the only truly joyous moment in this work:
One of the most effective and most frequently employed techniques is Blitzstein's use of rhythmic speaking. Almost every character engages in this for reasons germane to his/her character. Leo speaks, then sings in a nervous manner, when he tells of Horace's safe-deposit box:

One of the boys opened the box. Yes sir, you see—One of the boys, Joe Horn it was, he took the key.
Oscar complains about his share of the Marshall deal:

In the opening of Act II, as Regina prepares for the party, she chants a relentless and driving line of repeated B-flats. The line rises from quick-paced orchestral interludes, which stops each time Regina begins to sing. At this pitch, the singer can choose either to almost speak the text or create a driven or "belted" singing sound. Either choice adds to the mounting tension of the scene.
Oh, Ad-die. Where are you? You send Belle up to me right a-way, I want my

hair fixed. You hear me?

The aforementioned musical example also points to another effective device which Blitzstein employs, that of silence on stage— an unaccompanied singer or dramatic pause. At the end of the ball scene, in the climax of a fight between Horace and Regina, amidst frantic activity on stage, Regina's last line, a curse on Horace, stops the action on stage:

Fig. 11 mm. 19-28, p. 79
Another effective use of silence comes during Act III, when Horace, who is having a heart attack, tries desperately to climb the stairs. Blitzstein's directions simply read: "Pantomime. Horace falls on the landing." As in Hellman's The Little Foxes, Regina remains motionless throughout Horace's struggle, and when she is sure he has breathed his last breath, she whispers his name to see whether he responds. The silence of that moment is very dramatic and very effective indeed.

Blitzstein's vocal jazz writing is at its best in the "Chinkypin" number. Jazz sings a tune which appears to be improvised, as he comments on the dialogue which he hears at the party:
Blitzstein instructs the singers to use many traditional vocal techniques such as "glissando," "portamento" and "parlando" in their interpretations. In addition, he calls for Jazz to sing in "falsetto" in the Chinkypin number. In a couple of instances, he asks characters to make vocalizations other than singing or speaking. Before Ben sings in "Greedy Girl" (Act III), he whistles as he reacts to the amount of "hush" money that Regina wants; and in the "Gallop," the chorus speaks an emphatic "whew" at various points in the lengthy and tiring dance.
Blitzstein used a mixed bag of tempi and interpretive musical markings for the singers, including the more traditional: "con spirito," "cantabile," "pesante," and "agitato," as well as the unusual: "poco pomposo," "Rag grazioso," and "Slow Blues." Occasionally, he provided quite elaborate markings, as in Act II, no. 6 "Waltz": "Allegretto Lusingando (Tempo di Valse, un poco rubato)."

There is hardly a character in Regina who does not have sustained, difficult singing. Vocal ranges are extensive, tessituras are high, and many characters, especially Birdie and Jazz must have a good command of coloratura and vocal flexibility. Birdie must sing a high D-flat, while Horace sings as low as F. Regina's role is most demanding dramatically and vocally. Originally written for a mezzo-soprano voice, its extensive range covers two-and-a-half octaves. In revisions, Blitzstein raised some of the lower parts so that a dramatic soprano could sing the role of Regina. Leo's tenor role is hardly typical of a Broadway musical, with a range that extends to B-flat and an unusually high tessitura.

Regina embraces a vast diversity in its melodic writing depending on the character and situation. Addie sings in two styles which seem appropriate for her character. In the opening of Act I—a spiritual:
Rubato, a piacere

Want to join the angels. Stand where the angels stand.

Fig. 14 mm. 1-9, p. 2

and in Act III--her version of "the Blues":

Fig. 15 mm. 11-17, p. 150
Birdie's Act III "Confession scene" incorporates a variety of melodic motives and vocal techniques which change each time her rambling dialogue shifts from subject to subject.

Fig. 16 mm. 8-11, p. 202

Fig. 17 mm. 4-6, p. 208
Regina sings both the most sumptuous and seductive long-phrased melodies, and the most abrupt and stark exposed lines:

Fig. 18 mm. 1-8, p. 152
As a general rule, Ben and Oscar's vocal parts typify their characters. They are both baritones, although Ben sings the lower part in ensembles and his role is written with heft: longer vocal lines with heavier orchestration. Oscar's vocal lines are shorter and more sporadic and are generally less interesting musically. Although they appear on stage together a great deal of the time, Ben's part is substantially larger than Oscar's, perhaps indicating his place in the Hubbard "pecking order."
The other two major characters appear on stage less, but have significant musical and dramatic roles--Zan and Horace. Zan's music is perhaps the freshest and most innocent. She sings long lyrical lines of pleasing melodies:

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 20 mm. 1-5, p. 73**

When she asserts her independence from Regina at the end of the opera, her vocal line soars with energy and power:

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 21 mm. 1-4, p. 248**

As the last major character to appear on stage, Horace must establish and develop his character in the shortest
amount of time. Blitzstein writes for Horace in short and deliberate phrases—quick and to the point for a man who has neither the energy nor stamina to sustain long conversation. He cleverly uses the extremities of Horace’s low range for "word painting":

Alexandra: (holds up bottle of medicine)
Oh, Papa, you feel bad again.
let me stay here for a while. No, I'm all right,
darling... Just ti-red.

Fig. 22 mm. 6-13, p. 101

In a preview article about Regina, the week of its New York opening, Leonard Bernstein alluded to what was to become one of the most critically acclaimed aspects of Blitzstein’s score—its text setting:
Regina herself, perhaps one of the most ruthless characters in show business sings melodies of enormous gentility and suaveness precisely at the moments when she is being the most unscrupulous and heartless. There is a kind of urbanity involved in the musical treatment of this character which results in a theatrical coup. How obvious it would have been to set her greedy, vindictive, dirty-hearted lines to insidious or bombastic music! I might say that this is the underlying technique of the whole piece: Coating the wormwood with sugar, and scenting with magnolia blossoms the cursed house in which these evils transpire.7

Form and Structure

Unlike most Broadway shows, Regina’s score does not contain a formal overture, entr’acte, or bow music which traditionally serve to herald the most familiar tunes; give audience late-comers a chance to be seated, before the show or during intermission; and to light the spark of applause in an enthusiastic crowd. Blitzstein’s score contains a short (32-bar) orchestral introduction to the Prologue. There is no scene-change music per se (as none is needed), although the "Gottschalk" number is referred to as "transition music" and he does provide "exit music" for characters, as needed (e.g., Ben’s final exit in Act III, at the end of "Greedy Girl"). Each musical segment is numbered and named, a practice common to both musical theater and opera; and in many ways, the structure of Regina resembles an opera or operetta as much as a Broadway musical.
Blitzstein composed many "set pieces" in *Regina*; that is, a musical number written for a specific character, which can be excerpted and performed in its entirety (e.g., Zan's "What Will It Be for Me?", Ben's "Greedy Girl" or Regina's "The Best Thing of All"). Each of these pieces contains a catchy tune and might be thought (especially by a producer), to have some commercial value apart from the entire score. But, *Regina*’s score is not made up entirely of set pieces. The opera also contains accompanied recitatives, through-composed arias, orchestral dances, and some lengthy orchestral passages which underscore dialogue.

Blitzstein’s use of form is varied. A few songs are written in a strophic or modified-strophic form (e.g., "Blues," "What Will It Be for Me?"), while Regina’s "Waltz" is in a modified Rondo form (AABA’CAD coda). Blitzstein also employs variations of binary and ternary forms with repeated sections, as in "Sing Hubbard" (AA‘BB‘) and Leo’s portion of Act II, scene 1: "Deedle, doodle..." (ABAA). In the numbers "The Best Thing of All" and Regina’s "Summer Day" ditty in Act II, scene 1 no. 6, Blitzstein uses AABA form. Most of these set pieces were composed in a modified version of a familiar musical theatre binary song style--"chorus/verse/chorus/verse/chorus," etc. They differ greatly from the larger through-composed numbers like Birdie’s "confession scene"--a dramatic scena and Jazz’s "Chinkypin" number--a combination of written material and improvised scat. Recitatives are both accompanied
and "secco." Some of the musical scenes (such as Act II, scene 1, nos. 1, 2 and 3—"Regina, Leo, Oscar") are extensive. These three musical numbers incorporate several singing styles and are grouped without interruption, lasting about eight minutes. It is this combination of forms which was applauded by some critics and called to task by others like Virgil Thomson:

The musical composition is that of an incomplete opera, of one that hands over the expressive obligation to mere speech whenever the composer feels inadequate to handle the dramatic line.8

**Harmonic Structure**

In his earliest notes, Blitzstein refers to tonal centers or keys for specific numbers; and by September 1948, he had devised a detailed tonality chart for the first five scenes.

By far, Blitzstein's tonality of choice for this score is C Major, as is evidenced by the many numbers which begin and end in this key. Though his modulations may be predictable, they are nonetheless varied: C Major to G Major (dominant); C Major to c minor (parallel minor); C Major to D-flat Major (Neopolitan); C Major to a minor (relative minor) and so forth. Blitzstein also seems to favor E-flat Major, B-flat Major and F Major. In fact, the second and third acts are written almost exclusively in these "flat keys." The interest of this work lies not in its harmonic innovations, but in its rhythmic and melodic writing. Blitzstein was first and
foremost a song writer. There is nothing especially new or original about Blitzstein's use of harmonies in *Regina*, and some critics were quick to point out what they felt were its musical shortcomings:

...by and large the tonal habiliment of the script, as performed, is raucous in sound, coarse in texture, explosive, obstreperous and strident...[and] remains in your reporter's mind a work of incomplete musical responsibility.9

But, perhaps Blitzstein's musical mission was not so much to invent a musical style or vocabulary, as to combine existing ones. In that respect, *Regina* received rave reviews:

Blitzstein [wrote] three distinct types of solo and ensemble numbers: querulous, disjointed music suited to the conniving brothers and their sister, as well as a couple of inane outbursts for Leo; some jazz music and spiritual pieces for the servants; and lovely lyric themes for Birdie, Alexandra and Horace.10

*Regina*’s score reflects the diversity of styles of music found in America: jazz, gospel, blues--rooted in American tradition and dances, opera, chamber music--adopted from European tradition. *Regina* also reflects the versatility of its composer whose musical training and personal tastes encompass both the desire to explore "the new" and reexamine the "tried and true." Although his mix of musical styles may have been curious to some, perhaps it was representative of a larger socio-economic statement (as was the case in so many of his works). That it, the idea of peaceful coexistence--blacks and whites, jazz and classical music, old beliefs and new
ideas. It may be that Blitzstein wanted to illustrate (by intention or coincidence), that different types of music were more similar than not; and just as Zan felt that there was a place at Regina's ball for her Angel Band (in addition to the "musicians from Mobile"), so too must a democracy exist for all forms of musical expression.

I do not wish to imply that this simplistic explanation is sufficient answer to the question of why Blitzstein combined so many musical styles in Regina. I can only draw conclusions, as others before me, based on Blitzstein's notes and his long-standing tradition to produce works of art which reflected his personal beliefs and the times in which he lived.

**Melodic and Rhythmic Motives**

Many of the important melodic and rhythmic motives in Regina are found in Blitzstein's use of jazz rhythms and "blue notes," as well as his use of a colloquial musical vocabulary. He frequently uses syncopated or "swing" rhythms, commonly found in Ragtime music. Examples include the Angel Band in Act I:
and the "Chinkypin" number in Act II:
One of the most effective rhythmic motives is Horace's "heartbeat" motif used in Act II, scene 1, whenever he is agitated and the conversation becomes tense. As Horace takes his heart medicine and his "spell" passes, the heartbeat slows and becomes more regular:

Fig. 25 mm. 1-4, p. 108

Some of the score's rhythmic motives, do not appear throughout the opera, but rather, become the musical anchor for a specific number, as in the case of a repeated rhythm in the Act III "Rain Quartet".
Allegretto (molto leggero)

Alexandra:  Make a qui-et day.

Birdie:     Make a qui-et day.

Fig. 26 mm. 10-13, p. 173

or the Act II "Gallop":

Fig. 27 mm. 5-9, p. 161

The score does contain a few melodic motives that appear throughout the work, such as Birdie’s "Lionnet" motif:
A melody which Ben first sings in Act III No. 7 "Greedy Girl" is repeated in the next musical number "Ben's Last" with different text:

Blitzstein's use of repeated material should not be mistaken as a use of "leitmotif," nor do most characters have specific music with which they can be associated. The score
for Regina should not be considered programmatic. Rather, Blitzstein's compositional credo of using "whatever works" for each character and situation seems to be the overwhelming and driving force of this work.

Orchestration

To accommodate his concept of combining different styles of music, Blitzstein scored Regina for a large and diverse musical ensemble. The pit consists of six winds (four of whom double), two brass, timpani and percussion, harp, piano, and a full string section. Onstage musicians include a chamber trio: piano, violin, and cello; and the "Angel Band": clarinet, trumpet, trombone, banjo, and washboard/drums. As is the case in all of his works, Blitzstein served as his own orchestrator for Regina. While this is certainly not unusual for a composer of traditional opera, it is rarely the case for Broadway musicals. As such, Blitzstein was truly able to be in control of his music, and create an orchestration which employs a broad spectrum of color and timbre, appropriate to each character, dramatic situation, and genre of music. One of the most fascinating uses of instrumentation is Blitzstein's use of instruments which appear in both the pit and Angel Band. Utilized in two distinct settings, the clarinet functions as a solo instrument in a jazz ensemble--the Angel Band--and as a part of a wind section in the pit. The result is a full and musically satisfying exploit of a
diverse and colorful instrument, played in two contrasting styles.

Blitzstein achieves some truly magical moments in the orchestration of *Regina*. The unexpected sound of a banjo and snare drum join a chatty clarinet in the "Prologue" to create a carefree Ragtime romp. Likewise, judicious use of bells, piano, guitar and muted brass throughout the score provides the subtle and unusual musical seasoning which flavor *Regina*. The orchestra never seems to overpower the singers, but rather, lends support and heightens the dramatic action.

**Use of Underscoring Dramatic Situation**

As a veteran composer of movie scores and incidental music for plays, Blitzstein recognized the power and importance of music as an element of drama. The score for *Regina* contains some very effective moments which add to the tension, suspense, or joy of a particular scene. Through the use of music in underscoring, Blitzstein was able to control the pace of the dramatic action--either speeding up or slowing down--to propel the compelling and complex story.

One particularly effective example of dramatic underscoring takes place before the curtain rises on Act III. Blitzstein composed a 20-bar introduction to the "Rain Quartet." In it, a flute and clarinet "converse" as strings spin a pleasing, tranquil melody, setting the scene for this light moment:
The frenetic and relentless pace of Regina's party preparations in Act II, scene 1 are underscored by a quick and chromatic line for a solo clarinet which pauses only as Regina barks out her orders to servants and family members alike. The resulting musical and visual picture is that of a chaotic household, where no one, not even Regina, is really in control:

Fig. 30 mm. 1-8, p. 172
A few moments later, Horace's entrance is marked by music whose first two phrases end in pauses--fermati--perhaps reinforcing Horace's slow and labored walk (complete with moments to rest), from the front door to his wheelchair:
Regina and Horace's ensuing conversation/argument is a splendid example of underscoring--complete with sung text, text spoken over orchestral writing, text spoken over sustained chords and text spoken in silence. In this musical number (Act II, scene 1: No. 6 "Horace and Regina"), Blitzstein displays true mastery of dramatic pacing, as he heightens and relaxes tension with the flow of the characters' conversation.

Blitzstein frequently asks characters to speak dialogue over a sustained orchestral chord which he notes with a fermata containing a star:

Horace: I suppose they've written you. You know I don't mean to gossip. I thought it only fair to tell you.
Regina: Why, why do people have to talk about this kind of thing? I can't last very long.
Regina: What do the doctors think caused your bad heart? Could it have been your...

Fig. 33 mm. 12-13, p. 115

Since most of the dialogue is underscored by music, the few moments in which dialogue is spoken in silence (Zan's lines at end of opera), or in which singing is a cappella (Regina's last sung line in Act II) are all the more dramatic and effective.
Use of chorus

Reaina’s score contains many fine moments of part-singing. Blitzstein uses a small group (Alexandra, Regina, Leo, Ben, and Oscar), in Act I: No. 3 "Small Talk" as a sort of "Greek chorus" commenting on themselves and the situation:

Fig. 34 mm. 1-4, p. 21

At the end of that number, Birdie and Marshall join the group in an energetic toast:
Another use of a small group is in the "Rain Quartet" at the beginning of Act III which includes Zan, Birdie, Addie and Horace.

*Regina* also contains some splendid large chorus writing--most notably, "Sing Hubbard" in Act II, scene 2. Here, Regina's party guests gossip and show their contempt for their hosts, all the while eating, drinking and dancing--brisk rhythmic speaking plays counterpoint to large sweeping vocal lines:
Women:

Allegro maestoso

Regina does a lovely party. Her festive board will reward the

heart-y. Champagne in ice, just twice a season. Who dares decline does

 treason.

Fig. 36 mm. 1-9, p. 127

Women I:

1. Notice that the visitor from up North she kept for herself.
2. Can't believe Regina would command sick Horace to be present. Women II:

Fig. 37 mm. 1-3, p. 130
Have I ever told you of the time—Ben Hubbard took my last dime? I was quite a giddy young man, but that Le-o takes the cake now. 

1. Yes you have, regularly.  
2. What a young scatter-brain!

Fig. 38 mm. 7-10, p. 130

we've just sacked, and pocketed our pride and sold it down the river. Dixie.

Fig. 39 mm. 5-8, p. 132
During the Act III "Rain Quintet" and at the end of the opera, Jazz and the Angel Band lead an offstage chorus in a spiritual. This music underscores dialogue between Zan and Regina. As Zan delighted in hearing this spiritual earlier in the act, she later draws strength from it, and is able to confront Regina at the end of the opera:
Versions of Regina

Since its inception in 1946, through its development, pre-Broadway showing, Broadway run and numerous subsequent productions, Regina has been a work in progress.

Blitzstein's first notes from 1946 indicate that he conceived the work on a grander scale than what appeared in a pre-Broadway trial in Boston and subsequent Broadway run. Blitzstein described the opening scene as "sizeable." It was to be expansive, introducing many incidental and major characters. In addition to this scene, set in the Shanty district, Blitzstein added a major ball scene and Horace's funeral in the last act. Characters at the ball included
Addie's sister and her three children. The "society orchestra" was to be a six piece ensemble.

Blitzstein's grand scheme for Regina even included a plan for how the show might be promoted: "...bands would "jam" on the street, as a come-on for the folks to attend the session at the restaurant [after the theatre] later on."\(^{11}\)

Blitzstein's "wish list" for talent to be involved in the show read like a who's who of Broadway. Choices for director included Joshua Logan, John Huston and Robert Lewis; conductors included Lehman Engel, Franz Allers, Fritz Reiner, Leonard Bernstein, and Maurice Abravanel. George Balanchine and Agnes De Mille numbered among Blitzstein's choices for choreographer.

The production staff which was eventually assembled for Regina was experienced and professionally savvy. Headed by veteran Broadway producer Cheryl Crawford, Regina was directed by Robert Lewis and conducted by Maurice Abravanel. Anna Sokolow served as choreographer. Horace Armistead created the settings and Aline Bernstein the costumes. Regina's future seemed bright. But in reality, input from a variety of strong artistic personalities (perhaps, especially, Lillian Hellman), financial considerations, and available talent to perform this monumental work all contributed to the down-scaling of Regina.

It would be presumptuous on the part of anyone examining this work to conclude that Regina was merely a victim of its
environment. On the contrary, I believe that many of Regina's revisions came about as a result of Blitzstein's own evolving concept of the work, as its composer-librettist.

The "Blues" number of Act II, scene 2 was originally written for Jazz, and was later (still pre-opening) reassigned to Addie. It is unclear from his notes why Blitzstein made this change--perhaps to add substance to Addie's role (she lacked a significant solo and Jazz already had the "Chinkypin" number).^{12}

During its pre-Broadway performances in New Haven and Boston, Regina underwent many changes, including healthy trimming of the dance music. By Regina's Broadway debut, the society orchestra of six has become a pianist and violinist. These changes were undoubtedly a result of financial considerations and not merely an artistic change of heart.

Three years later, when Cheryl Crawford presented Regina in a 1952 concert version, marked the first time the show was formally billed as an opera. In the one-time presentation of this revision, all dialogue was cut and the dramatic presence of Lillian Hellman as narrator (fresh from her now-famous appearance before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities), created a magical aura for the evening.

Regina underwent several revisions for the New York City Opera productions of 1953. Produced on a shoe-string budget for the fledgling City Opera, costumes and sets from the 1949 Broadway production were used once again. Cheryl Crawford had
stored them in a barn on Clinton Wilder’s country property, and was pleased to have another opportunity to see some return on her investment. Eager to have his opera produced again, Blitzstein made major changes for this production: cutting the Prologue even further, eliminating the dance music, and rewriting portions of Regina’s part from mezzo-soprano to soprano range to accommodate Brenda Lewis (who had appeared as Birdie in the 1949 production, and would now sing the role of Regina). Blitzstein was quoted about these revisions in a Saturday Review article:

In the Broadway version, I overloaded the dramatic part, the plotting, et cetera... Now I have cut down on some of that, and I’ve reinstated three numbers that when tried in New Haven seemed to slow the pace and delay the resolution.

In 1958, New York City Opera mounted a new production of Regina and Blitzstein revised the score yet again. The greatest "casualty" was the part of Jazz and the Angel Band, which were cut from the score entirely. Instead, those characters became part of the nameless extras in the Prologue, and the offstage chorus in the "Rain Quartet" and last scene. The "Chinkypin" number was eliminated, as well. Critical response to this version was typified by the reaction of the New York Post critic:

...for the current revival, he has tightened it further, giving the drama its most effective musical frame thus far... Though they [Jazz and the Angel Band] added local color, the drama now moves more unswervingly toward its malevolent conclusion.
The only published score (Chappell & Co. 1954), most closely reflects the 1953 version of the work. It includes Jazz and the Angel Band, but none of the dance music. The society orchestra, which had been as large as six pieces and as small as a duo, became a "chamber trio."

Regina has been recorded commercially twice. It was first released by CBS Records in 1958 and featured the New York City Opera production of that year. In its most recent recording (1992) by John Mauceri and the Scottish Opera Orchestra and Chorus, all of Blitzstein's original material was returned to this "reconstructed score."

Hearing the score in its entirety is indeed a treat, as some of the music (especially the Act II dances), is delightful. In addition, restored dialogue adds weight to Ben's role and meaning to the appearance of John Bagtry. The "Chinkypin" number is full of wonderful musical moments--scat/"improvised" singing and sassy instrumental interludes. Likewise, Blitzstein's stinging lyrics of "Naught's a naught," sung by Jazz in the Prologue (Cal sings only two lines of the song in the Chappell version), add a singular insight into relationship of the servants to the Hubbards and feelings about their situation. Although some of the dialogue is interesting (e.g., Regina's perusal of her guest list at the beginning of Act II, scene 2), it tends to slow the action and does little for plot development.
Although it is a current trend to "reconstruct" and then, record works which exist in many forms, I believe that in this case, attempting to do so and inferring that it is some sort of "definitive" version is an arrogant presumption. Regina is not a work which had been lost for centuries, nor is Blitzstein a composer about whom we know little. He was responsible for and authorized all the changes that affected his work. Although his reasons for revisions may have been based in part on the artistic and/or financial considerations and dictates of others, Blitzstein was not one to "sell-out" the artistic principles of his work. To imply that restoring all of the material which Blitzstein wrote for Regina somehow "fixes" the work, diminishes Blitzstein's art and critical decision-making as a composer/librettist. If Blitzstein was unhappy with the ultimate form of Regina, he was publicly silent about it; and that, it appears, was not Marc Blitzstein's way.

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1. Marc Blitzstein, notes on Regina, 17 August 1947.
State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 18 August 1947.


(November 1950): 53.


9. Ibid.


11. Marc Blitzstein, notes on Regina, 17 July 1946.

12. In his book, Mark the Music, p. 333, Eric A. Gordon refers to Cal's number "Blues," although I can find no other source, including Blitzstein's papers which assigns this number to that character.

13. Clinton Wilder was one of the associate producers of Regina on Broadway.


CHAPTER IV
OPERA OR MUSICAL THEATRE?

To a number of his contemporaries Marc Blitzstein was a paradox. A musician of high refinement and sophistication, he achieved his greatest successes with compositions of earthy character, whose texts often satirized the rich and exalted the poor.1

Marc Blitzstein composed Regina during an exciting time for the arts in America--post-World War II. New technology in the recording industry and television expanded existing audiences and developed new ones by broadening accessibility to the arts and entertainment. Columbia Records introduced the LP in 1948; and one year later RCA released the first 7-inch 45 RPM. After a year-long "audio war," both companies agreed that classical music was better suited to the LP discs and the 45s would be reserved for popular music. Music festivals and performing arts organizations sprang up throughout the country, providing dozens of new venues for performers and composers. These included: 1946--Caramoor Festival (Katonah, NY); 1949--NBC Television Opera Co.; 1950--Aspen Music Festival (Colorado), Marlboro Music Festival (Vermont).

Offerings in music literature reflected Americans' varied interests and studies in music, and included books by music critics and historians: Virgil Thomson, Willi Apel, John Jacob

81
Niles, Alfred Einstein, and Donald Grout.

But though the heightened visibility of the arts in post-war America was exciting, it was not without controversy. Fleeing war-ravaged Europe, many composers and performers arrived in America, eager to seek fresh performing opportunities. Some Germans, like conductor Wilhelm Furtwangler and pianist Walter Gieseking, received hostile receptions from veterans' groups because of their suspected roles with the Nazis (although each was subsequently exonerated). With the rise of communism in post-war Europe, many Americans (including Blitzstein, who had not been active for some years) resigned their memberships in the Communist Party. When Senator Joseph McCarthy began his communist witch-hunt in 1950, the liberal-minded arts community was heavily targeted.

From 1945-50, Broadway boasted some of its most popular and artful musicals of all time, including: Carousel (1945), Annie Get Your Gun (1946), Brigadoon (1947), Kiss Me, Kate (1948) and Guys and Dolls (1950). In 1949, the year Regina played on Broadway, South Pacific opened and enjoyed a successful run of 1,925 performances, making it one of the longest running Broadway musicals of its era. Kurt Weill continued to write and produce shows of the highest artistic standards, employing celebrated writers for his books and lyrics: Street Scene (1947), book by Elmer Rice/lyrics by Langston Hughes; Love Life (1948), book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner; and Lost in the Stars (1949), book and lyrics by
Maxwell Anderson. Original cast recordings on LPs, as well as appearances on radio and television variety shows, brought Broadway stars into the living rooms of America. Coast-to-coast touring productions provided thousands of theatre lovers with a magical glimpse of the "Great White Way."

As opera lacked the mass market appeal of Broadway musicals, opera composers were without adequate financial support to premiere their works in the popular arena. Thus, many composers limited their stage works to one-act operas and full-length chamber operas which bowed in regional productions or on college campuses: 1947--*The Mother of Us All* by Virgil Thomson, Columbia University, *The Trial of Lucullus* by Roger Sessions, UC Berkeley; 1948--*Down in the Valley* by Kurt Weill, Indiana University; 1949--*White Wings* by Douglas Moore, Hartford, CT.; 1950--*The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* by Lukas Foss, Indiana University; *The Triumph of St. Joan* by Norman Dello Joio, Sarah Lawrence College. Unlike many of his colleagues, Gian Carlo Menotti enjoyed successful New York premieres early in his career, presenting a double-bill of *The Telephone* and *The Medium* in 1947; and *The Consul* (which won the Pulitzer Prize for music) on Broadway in 1950.

When Blitzstein received a commission from the Koussevitsky Music Foundation in 1946, he had not written a major work for the stage since *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937). The interruption of the war years and the time involved in Blitzstein's method of work--serving as composer, librettist
and lyricist for all of his works—had not provided him with the opportunity or appropriate vehicle for a full-length work. After what was undoubtedly careful consideration, Blitzstein avoided the overt political and social controversy so prevalent in his earlier works and turned his attention to adapting a highly acclaimed and respected work of the American theatre, Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. Hellman's play provided Blitzstein with all the trappings of a good opera: heros and villains, murder, intrigue, and characters who were bigger than life. But what sort of work should he write? And for which audience? The issue which Blitzstein wished most dearly to avoid—"classification"—became key in the promotion and ultimate evaluation of this work.

Only one thing bothers him [Blitzstein], and that no more than a little. He hopes no time will be wasted by anybody in trying to decide just what his "Regina" is, whether it should be called opera or music drama or drama with music, or a play with music..."I call it drama in music," he says. "But that does not seem to go well in the advertising. Whatever the name, it's a fusion, it has new things in it."²

Critics, did, however "waste time" deciding what to call *Regina*; and that issue became a part of nearly every review the work received at its Broadway premiere:

It is opera, probably, but like no other opera, except perhaps, Wagner...Whatever you call this new thing, opera or music drama or whatever, it is stunning. And if you call it just a show, as that it is a stunner too.³

On Broadway, a "musical drama" is a grand opera to the opening of which music critics are not usually invited...*Regina* the "musical drama," is good enough American grand opera
until a better comes along!"

[Virgil Thomson, *NY Herald-Tribune*] The musical composition is that of an incomplete opera..."

First of all, what is it? There seems to be no adequate term to describe what Mr. Blitzstein has done with Miss Hellman's play. In our opinion, it is not an opera... Perhaps Mr. Blitzstein is developing a new means of musico-dramatic expression for which no name has been invented.

[Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*] Since the theatre going public is larger than the public devoted to opera, it is the fashion to avoid the word "opera" in public relations. *Regina* is described in the program as "a musical drama." But "opera" is the proper word.

[Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*] Although it is a point of honor not to call opera "opera" but something less portentous, *Regina* is opera in a modern style written for lovers of music.

On the day of *Regina*’s New York opening, Leonard Bernstein wrote an article, "Prelude to a Musical" which appeared in the *New York Times*. The piece is a curious combination of a collegial "pat-on-the-back" for Blitzstein and a rather involved (and perhaps self-indulgent) quest for Bernstein, as he questioned (and then, proceeded to speculate) why American composers are afraid to use the word "opera" in describing their works:

In re-examining these lines I find I grossly overused the word work to designate "Regina." And this symbolizes to me one of the great problems with which serious American composers for the theatre have to deal. I suppose that I should have just relaxed once or twice and said "opera"; just come right out and said it. But the particular stigma which has attached
itself to this term in America has prevented me - and I should guess, the producers of Regina as well - from frankly using it.9

Whatever the reason not to call Regina an opera, it was a decision that continued to plague this work even after Blitzstein revised it (removing the dialogue), for a 1952 concert presentation. Critics were quick to call the new format an improvement:

[Arthur Bronson, Variety] ...as done Sunday night, with emphasis on the score instead of the book, Regina proved exciting entertainment, full of color and variety.10

Regina profited considerably from this form of presentation...In a concert version, with judicious cuts, Blitzstein's score could be enjoyed for what it is - shrewd and entertaining musical comment and characterization. What seemed a failure as a stage work is quite effective as a kind of dramatic oratorio.11

Blitzstein's further revisions for the New York City Opera's 1953 production did not solve the "mystery" of Regina's classification:

[Ronald Eyer, Musical America] ... what it may be as an opera, from the musicological point of view, is a little difficult to ascertain. I have called it a jazz opera - a designation the composer probably would not approve of - not only for want of better term but also because it is dominated by dance and syncopated rhythms and because its airs and pieces have the physiognomy of Broadway ballads and embody many of the cliches of popular songs...the whole presents no profile...it defies classification.12

Regina did not so much "defy" classification as change with revisions. The work which Blitzstein first called "a musical drama" in its Broadway opening in 1949, "evolved" and
was reclassified (by Blitzstein), as an "opera" in 1952, and henceforth was referred to as such.

After Regina's Broadway debut and subsequent limited run, Blitzstein had time to reflect on what had happened to the work on which he had labored for three years. The 1949 Broadway season had produced the wildly successful Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, South Pacific, and Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's operatic Lost in the Stars; and 1950 featured Gian Carlo Menotti's Pulitzer Prize-winning The Consul. Blitzstein examined what he believed to be the future and direction of the American musical in "Notes on the Musical Theatre," an article which he wrote for Theatre Arts magazine (June, 1950). The tone of the piece is that of a puzzled, disappointed, angry, and perhaps even jealous man who not only scrutinizes the fate of American musical theatre, but snipes at a few of his colleagues:

The real advance of the last thirty years in the American stage has been in the field of musical theatre. As a matter of fact, something new has been emerging on Broadway. Call it lyric drama, lyric theatre, musical drama, musical theatre, Broadway opera; call it what you like...It is a form, this new thing, something like opera (don't say the naughty word). Actually it is our kind of opera, opera of this place and this time...

[of Kurt Weill]...Weill['s]... music [is] often too cautiously and abjectly patterned upon accepted formulas...

[of Virgil Thomson, who had panned Regina]... "Four Saints in Three Acts," an amiable confection, in which an entirely irrelevant production was plastered upon an abstract script and score and provided a theatrical
treat which served as dessert for no perceivable meal...

[of Gian Carlo Menotti]... Menotti is young, often naive; he has a long and healthy future before him. His emotional drive will take care of itself; what he needs is more intellectual vigilance, more ruthlessness in matters of taste, a firmer and more personal musical fibre. I feel confident about him.¹³

Perhaps Blitzstein had reason to be disillusioned with a business in which he had poured the heart and soul of his creative energies. As Blitzstein’s biographer Eric A. Gordon notes:

It’s not so much that Blitzstein begrudged a fellow composer his success. But, Menotti was still in his thirties, and in March [1950] Blitzstein would turn forty-five—the age by which Siloti had predicted he would be a mature composer. He had just invested more than three years’ work on a show that ran seven weeks. Would he soon be over the hill and never have been on top?¹⁴

One of the issues which Blitzstein faced was his self-identity as a composer/lyricist, and how he was perceived by critics. Blitzstein belonged to a generation of young American composers whose musical training was primarily Eurocentric. His formal training, which included studies in harmony, counterpoint and form was taught by European masters. His diverse circle of musical friends included Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, each of whom had studied with Nadia Boulanger (as had Blitzstein), and developed an unmistakably individual "American" style. Although Copland composed for the stage (opera and ballet), the body of his work was diverse
and provided him with a strong presence in the concert hall as a composer of "serious music." Bernstein developed a reputation as a conductor in tandem with his accomplishments as a composer for the theatre, and as such, lent credence to his image as a "serious composer." Blitzstein's "musical identity crisis" arose as he attempted to "cross over"—changing existing criteria for how audience and critics evaluate structure, form, and musical vocabulary by adapting/redefining structure to include a more vernacular musical vocabulary to complement his lyrics and libretti, and more flexible forms to accommodate both "set pieces" and extended musical scenes. What Blitzstein referred to as "a fusion" in Regina was perceived to be a hybrid. With no distinct or easy method of classification, Regina was dismissed by many critics as the concoction of a composer who couldn't make up his mind.

It is difficult for audiences today, not to imagine "cross-over artists" (composers and performers who write and/or perform different types of music). Although this trend is more visible among popular recording artists, it is increasingly en vogue with classical musicians. Opera singers such as Kiri Te Kanawa, Jerry Hadley and Frederica Von Stade have recorded revivals of Broadway scores and many opera singers have performed with popular artists. Beverly Sills and Marilyn Horne have even appeared with "the Muppets," and Luciano Pavarotti has included rock star Sting in his
"friends" concerts.

In generations past, personable opera singers like Mario Lanza helped to popularize "legit" singing by programming and recording mainstream popular songs along with arias. Likewise, Ezio Pinza and Helen Traubel made successful Broadway bids in productions of *South Pacific* (1949) and *Fanny* (1954); and *Pipe Dream* (1955), respectively. But the designation "opera" did not set well with the musical theatre crowd, and even though a recognizable opera singer might be perceived as a box office draw, a like description of a work would not be. Despite the success of *Carmen Jones* (1943), other attempts to "popularize" opera stories on Broadway, like *My Darlin' Aida* (1952), met with limited success.15

The listening and buying audience of today is less likely to be amazed by diverse and unlikely combinations of artists and musics. In fact, they have come to expect it. Like artistic decathletes, performers must excel in many musical events if they are to attain their ultimate goal--reaching the widest possible audience. Perhaps it was in this spirit of inclusion--making Regina accessible to a larger, more diverse audience--that Blitzstein, by not choosing a specific genre with which to identify his work, in fact redefined a genre and created his "fusion"--Broadway Opera.

So, what is Regina--opera, musical theatre, music drama, musical play? Or is it (as Blitzstein and others suggested), "something new"? The more relevent question might be, "What
was Regina?," for just as Regina has evolved in the last forty-five years, so too, our perception and the criteria by which we, as a critical mass, evaluate these forms has also changed.

It is well-documented through his notes, that as Marc Blitzstein embarked on the journey of Regina, he was indeed sailing what for him were uncharted waters. He knew that the work would be large in scope, but perhaps did not know exactly how large until he arrived at his destination. Did he set out to write an opera, per se? Probably not. Blitzstein viewed himself as a writer/composer for the theatre, and as such, was interested in producing works which were the most effective for the actors and audience, and most personally satisfying. Blitzstein used many labels to describe his works for the stage: The Harpies (one-act opera), The Cradle Will Rock and No for an Answer (a play with music), I've Got the Tune (radio song play), Regina (opera), and Reuben, Reuben and Juno (musical).

However Blitzstein chose to classify each of his works for the stage, the ultimate decision was never intended as a way to limit the scope of a work or to exclude an audience, but rather reflected his personal vision for each work. Blitzstein's choice of subjects for his original libretti (as well as the choice of The Little Foxes, whose universal message transcends limits of time and place) was deliberate and filled with the immediacy and urgency of his contemporary
world. Likewise, his compositional credo, using "what works," reflected his desire to utilize music from all sources to create works of his time in which text and music shared equal roles. This is what Blitzstein believed made good theatre.

Music in the theater is a powerful, an almost immorally potent weapon....There is only one rule I know: follow the theater instinct.16

15. *Carmen Jones* was an adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen*, with lyrics and libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II. It opened on Broadway in 1943 and enjoyed a successful run of 502 performances. A less than successful experiment in operatic adaptation, *My Darlin' Aida*, with music by Verdi and Hans Spialek, and lyrics/libretto by Charles Friedman played only 89 performances.

Onstage

Since its premiere in 1949, Regina has been produced more than a dozen times by the New York City Opera and regional opera and theatre companies, including Santa Fe Opera (1959), Houston Grand Opera (1980) and the Long Wharf Theatre (1988); and each time a production is mounted, the thorny path of casting must be traveled. Assembling a cast for the premiere, Blitzstein drew upon the talents of opera and musical theatre veterans and newcomers:

...even on Broadway we needed operatic voices, Rise Stevens and Blanche Thebom, both comely American mezzos, respectfully declined the role of Regina. The thought of eight performances a week sent shivers up their spines. Finally, when Jane Pickens auditioned, we settled. She was tall, handsome, Southern, and musicianly.¹

Jane Pickens had performed as part of a vaudeville act, the Pickens sisters, in the 1930s. Later, she enjoyed a solo career as a popular singer. Pickens had received formal vocal training with Marcella Sembrich of Metropolitan Opera fame and appeared to have enough of the right "package" to be a respectable Regina. When Tallulah Bankhead (the original Regina in The Little Foxes) heard that Jane Pickens was cast,
she quipped: "I didn’t even like her when she was one of the Andrews Sisters."

Brenda Lewis was chosen to play Birdie, after having first auditioned for the role of Regina. She had already established a career as an opera singer, performing regularly with the New York City Opera, and her sizeable voice and considerable acting skills won her rave reviews for her portrayal of Birdie.

Other cast members included veteran singing actor William Wilderman as Horace; Priscilla Gillette, fresh from a cross-country tour of *Brigadoon*, as Zan, newcomer Russell Nype as Leo, David Thomas as Oscar, and George Lipton, who had appeared on Broadway in *Annie Get Your Gun*, as Ben. A young William Warfield made his Broadway debut in the role of Cal.

Casting the Angel Band was even more challenging, as Blitzstein needed a singing trumpet player for the role of Jazz. He chose Bill Dillard, a well-known jazz artist from Philadelphia. Musicians Buster Bailey, Benny Morton, Bernard Addison, and Rudy Nichols rounded out the quintet.

Although the reviews for Blitzstein’s score were mixed, most critics acknowledged the efforts of the performers:

Opera singers are not supposed to be actors also, but Mr. Blitzstein’s are. As the voracious, merciless Regina, Jane Pickens acts and sings with the ferocity of a poisonous snake. Brenda Lewis’ pathetically tippling Birdie is a masterpiece of acting and singing....The compassionate Negro cook--warm and genuine in Lillyn Brown’s performance; the two malevolent brothers--perfect in the performing of David Thomas and George Lipton;
the tender daughter—sweet and eloquent in the person of Priscilla Gillette; William Wilderman’s ailing Horace is intelligently played and sung more dynamically than his heart condition warrants.2

A few, like Virgil Thomson gave compliments grudgingly:

William Wilderman...is vocally adequate. And Jane Pickens has a clarity of singing speech that is in every way admirable. The rest of the cast is without musical distinction. Even the orchestra, directed by no less a musician than Maurice Abravanel, has a splintery sound.3

Blitzstein’s notes from May 4, 1949 indicate that he cast a wide net in his efforts to secure performers for the original production. Others who were initially considered included Robert Rounseville (later, of Man of La Mancha fame) as Leo, Heidi Kroll as Zan, and Ernest McChesney (who eventually appeared in the NY City Opera 1958 production) as Marshall.

Much of the original cast was retained for the 1952 concert performance of Regina. Cast changes included Randolph Symonette as Ben and Clarisse Crawford (who had played Belle in the Broadway production) as Addie. (Interestingly, in his review of that production, New Yorker columnist Douglas Watt also mentioned a New York workshop production of "another recent work," Benjamin Britten’s Albert Herring.)

Regina was presented as part of New York City Opera’s spring and fall seasons in 1953. The major cast change was that of Brenda Lewis as Regina. By that time, Lewis, who had received rave notices for her 1949 portrayal of Birdie was on
the roster of the Metropolitan Opera and had established a fine reputation as a singing actress. She brought a fiery passion and seductiveness to Regina's character which Jane Pickens had been unable to do. Other newcomers to the 1953 production included Ellen Faull as Birdie and Julius Rudel as conductor.

When Regina was revived for the New York City Opera's 1958 spring season, it featured debut artists Carol Brice as Addie and Helen Strine as Zan. Elisabeth Carron appeared as Birdie and Joshua Hecht sang the role of Horace. This production was staged by Herman Shumlin and designed by Howard Bay, both of whom had contributed their creative talents to the original production of The Little Foxes. It comes as no surprise that this was Lillian Hellman's favorite production. It was conducted by Samuel Krachmalnick and was recorded later that year, under the auspices of the Koussevitsky Music Foundation.

After Regina's Santa Fe Opera debut in 1959, it was not produced professionally until 1977, when Michigan Opera Theatre mounted a new production. The company cast the leads from musical theatre tradition, featuring Joan Diener-Marre (from Broadway's Kismet and Man of La Mancha) as Regina, and Ron Holgate (from the Broadway production of 1776) as Ben. The challenging tessitura of Regina's part did not go unnoticed by critics:
Her [Joan Diener-Marre] singing voice, with its big belting style, remained unsteady throughout the midrange and generally unattractive in tone...*

One reviewer of that 1977 production appeared to echo the sentiments Cheryl Crawford expressed when Regina premiered in 1949--it was probably a work ahead of its time--but with changing times, had come of age:

Now that the day has passed when certain folks were trying to make Broadway respectable or opera popular, with the critics sitting on the fence, Regina should have its day in the sun. 5

Houston Grand Opera's 1980 production of Regina featured a cast of accomplished singers. Maralin Niska appeared as Regina, Elisabeth Carron recreated her portrayal of Birdie, and Giorgio Tozzi sang Ben. One critic aptly described the role of Regina as "a Brunnhilde with a figure."

In 1982, two opera companies, Kansas City Lyric Opera and Chicago Opera Theater cut expenses by sharing a production.

In 1988, the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut mounted a new production of Regina which incorporated many changes, including a smaller pit orchestra (15 pieces), which played behind a scrim. Other changes were not favorably received:

They only 'indicated' the ballroom scene, cutting the chorus and dance sequences, and they made of the black servant Cal's "Chinkypin" number an angry, drunken affair somewhat at odds with his religiosity. 6

Boston Lyric Opera's 1991 production was directed by longtime Met star Rosalind Elias (who had appeared in the
title role in the Long Wharf Theatre production). Soprano Jennifer Ringo, who had sung the role of Zan some eleven years earlier in Houston, appeared as Birdie.

The most recent New York City Opera production in 1992 was again directed by Rosalind Elias and employed the Kansas City Lyric sets (now ten years old). Elias cut Regina even further:

I've tightened up the piece so that we get right into the theater part of it. I really do believe that that's the way Blitzstein wanted it.7

In Regina's numerous productions over the last decade, many issues remain constant: use of singing actors vs. opera singers, the "reshaping" of the score--adding/deleting characters, musical numbers, etc., the challenge of casting the role of Regina, and the desire to discover "new truths" about this work--still only forty-five years old.

Paving the way

Because of its eclectic nature, Regina does not seem to have evolved from any specific tradition of musical theatre. But, two works must certainly be counted among its precursors: Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's Showboat (1927) and George Gershwin and DuBose Heyward/Ira Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (1935).

Based on Edna Ferber's novel by the same name, Showboat, was unlike any musical of its time. Its dramatically-charged plot and three-dimensional characters broadened the scope of
Some of its musical numbers are so successful in their combination of theatrical elements, music, acting, scene, as to suggest openings for the development not of mere musical comedy, but of popular opera.8

George Gershwin called *Porgy and Bess*, "an American Folk Opera." Its glimpse into the rough life of Catfish Row moved audiences. Poverty, domestic violence, and exuberant living painted a bittersweet and convincing impression of a segment of American life not usually depicted on the musical stage.

Kern and Gershwin's scores are full of jazz idioms. In *Showboat*, Julie sings "the Blues" in her torch song "Can't Help Lovin' that Man," and much of the score of *Porgy and Bess* is a jazz masterpiece. Many of Hammerstein's lyrics in *Showboat*, and DuBose Heyward/Ira Gershwin's words in *Porgy and Bess* attempted to personalize the dialogue of black characters by incorporating "negro dialect" into the spoken word. In retrospect, some of its usage may seem a bit contrived. However, it appears to be a sincere effort on the part of each lyricist to add an element of realism to the dramatic action.

Blitzstein was undoubtedly mindful of how well the black characters with major roles were received in each of these works as he constructed the libretto of *Regina*, expanding the roles of Addie and Cal, and adding Jazz (and the Angel Band) and Chinkypin.
Although *Showboat* and *Porgy and Bess* each included a "love story," it served only as a subplot to the socio-economic conflicts that propelled the drama. Perhaps Blitzstein believed that the plot of *Regina*, which featured no discernible love story, could be as readily accepted on the musical stage, as it had been on the dramatic stage.

Billed as "a dramatic musical," Kurt Weill's *Street Scene* (1947) embodied many of the dramatic plot elements which had been established in *Showboat* and *Porgy and Bess* a decade earlier--poverty, domestic violence, unhappy marriages, and the exuberance of youth. Although it is unlikely that Blitzstein was influenced significantly by *Street Scene* (he was already composing *Regina* when Weill's work opened on Broadway), he must have been heartened to see that such an intense drama (again, without a "love story") would be so well-received by critics and the public. Critic Olin Downes called *Street Scene* "the most important step towards significant American opera yet encountered in the musical theatre."¹⁹

**Regina's legacy**

Blitzstein most certainly exercised great influence over the next generation of composers and their works for the stage. For even though he did not live long enough to become an elder statesman of the composition world and name an heir apparent, many, especially Leonard Bernstein, acknowledge
their tremendous debt to Blitzstein. At the very least, composers were encouraged to expand the scope of their works by incorporating extended musical numbers, vernacular musical idioms, and increased vocal and dramatic demands for singers.

Less than a decade after Regina's Broadway bow, works like The Golden Apple (1954), Candide (1956), The Most Happy Fella (1956) and West Side Story (1957) firmly established the changing face of the Broadway musical. Although not all of these works were commercially successful, each was critically acclaimed.10

Frank Loesser called The Most Happy Fella "a musical," despite efforts to label it an opera:

I may give the impression this show has operatic tendencies. If people feel that way-fine. Actually all it has is a great frequency of songs.11

Loesser's musical arranger Don Walker said of The Most Happy Fella: "This is a musical comedy expanded. Not an opera cutdown."12

An ardent fan of Regina, Frank Loesser acknowledged Blitzstein's special contribution to musical theatre in an essay which appeared in the libretto of the 1958 recording:

...Blitzstein knows that the very purpose of song is to provide extravagant but somehow clear expression for emotional outburst. Time and time again in Regina, the composer-adaptor has found these outbursts and made them resound unforgettable for me. Some are like bells, others like thunder, some piteous and some sprightly, some viciously angry and others full of heroic triumph. But altogether they form more than a chain or series of illuminations. They make a bright cloth out
of the whole strong fabric of the original play--always true to its meaning...⁰¹³

In the contemporary theatre, the works of Stephen Sondheim perhaps most closely reflect the spirit of Blitzstein's compositional credo--"using what works." Serving as his own lyricist, Sondheim's words are meticulously set in a most natural and vernacular manner. Like Blitzstein, Sondheim's genius as a songwriter is manifest in his economical marriage of words and music.

Blitzstein's legacy

Time and again Leonard Bernstein noted his indebtedness to Marc Blitzstein and his affinity for his work. As a student at Harvard, Bernstein organized and performed in a production of The Cradle Will Rock. He conducted and recorded The Airborne Symphony in 1966 (released ten years later), with Orson Welles as the Monitor. Bernstein dedicated his opera Trouble in Tahiti to Blitzstein. In one scene of the opera, the character Dinah meets with her psychiatrist and tells him of a recurring dream: "There is a garden, come with me," she says. Perhaps that line inspired the title of Blitzstein's cantata, This is the Garden (1957). In an earlier scene of Trouble in Tahiti, the "scat" sung by a trio of jazz singers includes a subtle reference to Lina Abarbanell, Blitzstein's mother-in-law. Bits of melodic material from Regina were borrowed by Bernstein for his works, West Side Story and Mass.
Their close friendship and long-time musical association were inseparable.

In the late 1970s, Leonard Bernstein was instrumental in sparking interest to "reconstruct" Regina—including all of Blitzstein's original libretto and score. The project was completed by John Mauceri and Tommy Krasker; and a new recording of Regina was released in 1992.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this document, I stated that I believe Regina is an important work and worthy of investigation. Regina has not only survived countless "versions" (either by Blitzstein, or today, by others), it has thrived to become one of the most performed American operas of our time. Its power and impact attracts performers and audiences, alike. It remains a source of discussion, controversy, and exciting musical theatre. The fact that it is examined and reexamined—that directors and "Reginas" search for ways to put their individual stamp on a production—that critics continue to ponder upon its classification—that audiences today support it more than in its 1949 premiere—all attest to the greatness of this work.

I do not believe that Blitzstein set out to write "the Great American Opera" with Regina. What he did intend to do, as he did with all of his works for the stage, was to create meaningful theatre. As Regina continues to be performed, it
holds a special place in the repertory of American opera, as a synthesis of Blitzstein's musical genius and passion for the theatre.

My field is musico-dramatic, musico-lyrical, and just plain music. If I find myself tending towards writing music for voices, for the theater, for films, for radio and television, it is because I am a product of my time -- and my time is one of urgency and direct communication in the arts. If it be argued that such a formulation of mine might destroy my chances for "immortality" (and as a serious composer I assure you that I too have that bee in my bonnet), then I can only say that greater artists than I have faced their moment squarely in their work, and have not lost their prestige with posterity on that account. Subject-matter, as such, can never make or break a work of art. Its lasting qualities depend on the artist's personality, on the equation of content-and-form, and on a lot of other intangibles. I am content to have my work undergo the test of repeated hearings, of Time, and of Tarnish.14


5. Ibid.


9. Ibid., 259.


12. Ibid.


14. Marc Blitzstein quoted in a concert program at Severance Hall, Cleveland, Ohio, January 18, 1948, Gordon (Mark the Music).
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