



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

UNITED STATES MARINE BAND
Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 7:30 P.M. ET
Streaming at [youtube.com/usmarineband](https://www.youtube.com/usmarineband)
Major Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Kurt Weill (1900–50)

Little Threepenny Music

Overture
The Moritat of Mack the Knife
The Instead-of Song
The Ballad of the Easy Life
Polly's Song and Tango-Ballad
Cannon Song
Threepenny Finale

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Sonatina No. 1 in F, TrV 288, "From an Invalid's Workshop"

Allegro moderato
Romance and Minuet
Finale: Allegro molto

PROGRAM NOTES

Little Threepenny Music

Kurt Weill (1900–50)

German composer Kurt Weill fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and was living in New York by 1935. Seven years prior, in 1928, Weill had composed what came to be his greatest commercial success, *The Threepenny Opera*. The idea for the theater piece came from the famous author Bertolt Brecht, who had become fascinated with John Gay's Baroque parody of George Frideric Handel called *The Beggar's Opera*, written in 1728. Brecht updated the concept and began collaborating with the young and talented Weill. The piece was in a state of revision up to the opening curtain, and many predicted that this hybrid opera-theater work filled with jazz music and popular dance styles would be an utter flop. On the contrary, the sharp-witted urban subject matter and infectious tunes enthralled audiences.

There are no strings in Weill's re-orchestration, and he adds a bandoneon (small accordion) and banjo, essentially writing a score for a "Classical" jazz band. Despite some critics citing Weill's use of commonplace musical styles and an unconventional orchestra in labeling the opera as "degenerate," the opera's popularity continued to increase. Within a year of its debut, Otto Klemperer, then conductor of the Berlin State Opera, commissioned Weill to arrange a suite of the most popular music from the opera. This concert version, titled *Little Threepenny Music*, was premièred in 1929. Many of the movements pay homage to Gay's original play by cleverly mimicking Handel's Baroque musical style. *Little Threepenny Music* also features one of Weill's most recognizable melodies. It is the theme song of one of the main characters, a gang leader named Macheath, though most people call him by his ominous nickname, "Mack the Knife."

Sonatina No. 1 in F, TrV 288, "From an Invalid's Workshop"

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Richard Strauss' four masterworks for chamber winds fascinatingly occur at opposite ends of his oeuvre. His celebrated Serenade in E-Flat (1881) and Suite in B-Flat (1884), both for thirteen wind players, clearly reflect the Classicism of his upbringing. His father performed for nearly fifty years at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, and was decidedly anti-Wagnerian but unable to eschew the transition to modernism due to his duties as principal horn. It was his devotion to composers such as Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart that had an early impact on his son's studies and is clearly reflected in these early works for winds.

After more than sixty years Strauss, nearing the age of eighty, returned once again to write for a small wind ensemble penning two sonatinas in close succession. The first was composed in the spring and summer of 1943 while convalescing, hence the inscription "from an invalid's workshop." Strauss first composed the two-part second movement, Romance and Minuet, in February of 1943, followed by the first in March and the Finale in July of that year. The instrumentation is slightly expanded from his celebrated Serenade in E-Flat (he famously

critiqued this early work's scoring that "double woodwind against four horns is impossible") employing two flutes, two oboes, three clarinets, basset horn, bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon to oppose the four horns.

Shortly after the completion of *Sonatina No. 1*, on October 2, 1943, the opera house that was not only a home to his father, but also the host to his own genre-shaping opera premieres, was destroyed in a bombing during the Second World War. Strauss wrote to his friend and biographer, Willi Schuh:

The destruction of the Munich Court Theater, the holy site of the first *Tristan* and *Meistersinger* performances, where I heard *Freischütz* for the first time 73 years ago, where my good father sat in the orchestra for 49 years at the first horn desk, ...is the greatest catastrophe of my life, for which there is no consolation and at my age no hope....With *Capriccio* [premiered in Munich one year earlier in October 1942], my life's work is ended, and the notes that I scribble now for my heirs as 'wrist exercises' ...have absolutely no meaning for music history.... It is only a way to drive away the boredom of idle hours, since one can't read Wieland or play Skat the whole day.

Optimism slowly emerged as he continued his "wrist exercises" the next year with his *Sonatina No. 2*, "Cheerful Workshop," dedicated "to the spirit of the eternal Mozart at the end of a grateful life." While these two pieces were indeed an echo of the Mozart-infused wind writing of his teenage years, the soundscape is clearly Strauss' own. As the prevalence and import of wind ensembles and concert bands has become more popular over the remainder of the twentieth-century, perhaps music history has found meaning in these masterpieces after all.