



## **The Seven Deadly Sins / Mahagonny**

Welcome to this audio-described performance of **The Seven Deadly Sins** and **Mahagonny**, by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, in a production by The Royal Opera House. The Director is Isabelle Kettle.

The Royal Opera House website introduces this production: British Director and Jette Parker Young Artist Isabelle Kettle reimagines Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's darkly satirical operas in a timely comment on gender politics. This production has been created with streaming in mind, building the filming element of the piece into the viewing experience while drawing on choreographer and movement director Julia Cheng's background in hip-hop, contemporary dance and physical theatre. *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Mahagonny Songspiel* depict a crisis of femininity and a crisis of masculinity respectively.

Opening with *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Weill's witty, satirical *ballet chanté* (sung ballet) is a work in seven scenes, following two aspects of one central character, Anna, as she embarks on a journey that reveals a new sin with every new



city. This production calls into question the reality of the women we encounter and the ways in which they are constructed for online consumption. Seven sections run seamlessly through the narrative; each represents one of the Deadly Sins.

The principal character, Anna is represented by two performers, Anna 1 and Anna 2. They are the two sides of Anna's personality, mirroring and sometimes conflicting with each other. Anna 1 remains almost entirely within the enclosed space of a dressing room. Anna 2 roams through the whole space.

Anna 1, 'the Artist', is a white woman in her mid-twenties, of slim to medium build with dark eyes, a firm jaw and a full mouth. Her wavy, dark brown hair is tied back in a ponytail. As she regards her alter ego, Anna 2, her smile can switch swiftly to purse with disapproval or disdain. Anna 1 is simply and informally dressed, in jogging bottoms under a dusty pink zipped sweatshirt, and colourful trainers.

Anna 2, 'the performer', is also in her twenties, a little shorter than Anna 1, slender with light olive skin, and long wavy black hair in a ponytail. She is in identical jogging bottoms and colourful trainers, under an identical pink sweatshirt as that of



Anna 1. Unlike Anna 1, she changes into a variety of costumes, including a loose cream Chinese silk jacket that whips around her as she dances.

Four men play Anna's family: mother, father and two brothers. Mother is a sturdy, broad chested black African man, aged 32. He is just below average height and shaven headed, with a neatly trimmed beard. Father has high cheekbones and dark eyes, with a light olive skin. His thick glossy black hair is brushed back from his forehead, with a newly grown beard. One of Anna's brothers is in his mid-twenties, with a pale skin and curly brown hair. A beard traces the line of his jaw. Her other brother is a white man, just under six foot tall, of medium build, with brown hair and a little stubble on his chin. They gather with her, initially dressed in casual modern clothes, t-shirts, shorts, jeans and trainers. Later they change into more costumes for the different 'sins', and finally all are in evening dress.

A dance artist plays several other characters. He is a lithe young man with curly brown hair and a short beard, whose dance matches and complements the expressive movement of Anna 2. He first appears in brown tracksuit bottoms and a



sleeveless brown singlet which exposes his well-muscled arms. A chunky gold chain loops round his neck.

For this production the orientation of the theatre has been completely reversed. The action still takes place on the stage, but with the huge empty auditorium now acting as a backdrop.

Much of the action of *The Seven Deadly Sins* takes place in a dressing room, within a rectangular shaped box, about ten metres long and five deep, with walls on three sides, which fills the left hand side of the stage. The open side faces towards what would usually be the back of the stage. In this reversed setting the construction is dwarfed by the vast auditorium that now rises behind it. The right half of the stage is a bare performance space. This space is open to the wings, the cluttered backstage area, and the cavernous auditorium.

The cream painted walls of the dressing room are approximately three metres high; a partition wall divides the space into two rooms, with a gap between the partition and the back wall forming the entrance between the rooms. It's a typically cluttered dressing room. The walls are lined with lockers and shelves, all laden with plastic crates and boxes of



clothes and shoes, feathers and boas. There are props around the floor, a model dog, a wig block on a stand.

In the main, right hand room, there is a door in the far-right corner, leading onto the open performance space. A double dressing table under mirrors flanked with banks of glowing light bulbs is set along the right-hand end wall. The surface is strewn with bottles, jars and make up, and a disposable coffee cup. There is a cream swivel chair by the dressing table beside a black padded adjustable chair. Another, wide, full length mirror fills the front end of this right-hand wall. This later becomes a window through which the women who are the two sides of Anna's personality can regard each other. There is also a blue easy chair next to a small white portable fridge on the floor with an empty glass vase on the top. A full-length mirror on wheels stands by the entrance to the next-door room.

The dressing room continues into the left-hand room. A wheeled clothes rail stands along the back wall, hung with costumes and a black feather boa. More clothes are piled in a purple plastic tub beneath, next to a pair of stiletto heeled black ankle boots. The walls on this side are covered with white tiles. On the right, against the partition wall, is a pedestal basin under



a mirror. Opposite, against the left-hand wall is a toilet with a red mop bucket alongside.

Most of the seven sins are depicted in the dressing room or the open performance space alongside, apart from Gluttony, which has its own setting, a vision of excess. A long, raised table is loaded with piles of fruit and vegetables. Placed as if strutting among the greenery and colourful fruit are stuffed animals, a male pheasant, a peacock and a white stork with a long curved beak. Dominating the table is a white stag with broad antlers. On the floor beside the table is a graceful brown deer and a couple of lambs. There is also a wicker picnic basket packed with crockery, cutlery and napkins. Anna 2 is resplendent in an apricot ball dress, a mass of gauze ruffles and tiers, very short at the front, revealing her slim legs, down to a full train sweeping the floor behind, and more frills flounce round her shoulders. Anna's family at the feast wear vivid patterned silk shirts; the mother has leopard print trousers.

Mahagonny Songspiel follows immediately after The Seven Deadly Sins, and uses the auditorium as the performance space.



*Mahagonny Songspiel* is a concentrated musical and dramatic encapsulation of the story about the rise to prominence and fall into decadence of an imaginary city founded on vice, that Weill and Brecht subsequently made into a full-length opera – *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. This production presents rich patrons of capitalism, reminiscent of the family from *The Seven Deadly Sins* and what they might have become, escaping from their world of responsibilities into an Edenic space, which leaves them reckoning with their own guilt.

The magnificent, horseshoe shaped auditorium of the Royal Opera House, lined with gilded galleries, glittering with lights that illuminate the rich red walls and seats, towers above a central arena which has been created by removing the stalls seats. It is transformed into a smooth, circular patch of emerald green grass. There are two openings in the grass on either side, through which characters ascend from below. The scene also makes use of the stalls circle seats that ring the space behind a waist high wooden barrier, painted pale blue, picked out with gilding.

The enigmatic character of a Dancing Man dominates the Songspiel, skipping through the action, manipulating events, his face mirroring the changing mood of the narrative. He's a wiry



young man with a shock of curly brown hair and a beard. His movements are very expressive, a mixture of staccato miming and wild, unrestrained dance that ranges across the space. He can be as floppy as a rag doll or as tautly flexible as a rubber band. He wears a scruffy dinner jacket with silk lapels over an open necked scarlet patterned shirt and narrow dark trousers.

Jessie is in her mid-twenties, of medium height with an open face, dark eyes and a generous mouth. Her wavy brown hair straggles untidily past her shoulders. Her mascara is smudged and her lipstick smeared. She wears an identical dress to the confection worn by Anna 2 in *The Seven Deadly Sins*; tiers and flounces of apricot coloured gauze, very short at the front, with a train at the back, and explosions of frills at each shoulder. It has a high frilled neck, adorned with a matching satin ribbon.

Bessie is in her early thirties, about five foot six inches tall, with a lightly tanned pale skin and thick wavy chocolate brown hair which tumbles down her back and shoulders. She has green eyes and an infectious smile. The performer describes Bessie, vividly, and accurately, as having a lush body balance and appetising forms. Her spectacular dress is in the same style as Jessie's, a creation of pale blue gauze ruffles, cascading from a





tight bodice to a train of frills. The neckline however is different, with a deep plunge revealing voluptuous curves.

Four men swagger boisterously across the grass. They are Charlie, Billy, Bobby and Jimmy. They wear identical black tie evening dress with black patent leather shoes, white silk evening scarves draped round their necks. Charlie has thick glossy black hair brushed back from his forehead, with a light olive skin, and a little stubble covers his chin. Billy is 25, with a pale skin and curly brown hair and a beard tracing his jaw. Bobby, a white man of thirty, is of medium build, with brown hair. Finally Jimmy, a burly black African man, has a shaven head and a neat beard. Later, with a change of costume he also takes on the role of the voice of God.



## Cast and Production Credits

The Seven Deadly Sins lasts for 35 minutes.

The cast is:

Anna I	<b>Stephanie Wake-Edwards</b>
Anna II	<b>Jonadette Carpio</b>
Tenor I (father)	<b>Filipe Manu</b>
Tenor II (brother)	<b>Egor Zhuravskii</b>
Baritone (brother)	<b>Dominic Sedgwick</b>
Bass (mother)	<b>Blaise Malaba</b>
Dance Artist	<b>Thomasin Gülgeç</b>

Mahagonny lasts for 25 minutes.

The cast is:

Jessie	<b>Stephanie Wake-Edwards</b>
Bessie	<b>Kseniia Nikolaieva</b>
Charlie	<b>Filipe Manu</b>
Billy	<b>Egor Zhuravskii</b>
Bobby	<b>Dominic Sedgwick</b>
Jimmy	<b>Blaise Malaba</b>
Dance Artist	<b>Thomasin Gülgeç</b>

Director	Isabelle Kettled
Dramaturg	Uzma Hamee
Lighting Design	James Farncombe



Designer	Lizzie Clachan
Movement Director	Julia Cheng
Conductor	Michael Papadopoulos
Orchestra	Royal Opera House
Music	Kurt Weill
Text	Bertolt Brecht

## **Film production credits**

Multi-camera Director	Peter Jones
Répétiteur & Pit piano	Michael Sikich
Musical Supervision	David Gowland
Producer	Angelique MacDonald
Production Manager	Clíona Ní Mhocháin
Senior Production Coordinator	Kit Withnail
Head of Film & Broadcast Prod	Anja Zoll-Khan

This production has been audio described for Vocaleyes and Sightlines, by Julia Grundy, with editing by Di Langford and sound engineering by Gary Giles.