

THE CRADLE THAT ROCKED: REDISCOVERING MARC BLITZSTEIN

Broadcast Schedule – Winter 2017

PROGRAM #: BLZ 17-01
RELEASE DATE: December 28, 2016

Act I - The Cradle that Rocked

Composer Marc Blitzstein has been all but forgotten, but in the 1930s he was famous for his political musical, *The Cradle Will Rock*. Composed by Blitzstein, Directed by Orson Wells, Produced by John Houseman...and banned by the Federal Government. The show, when it opened, in a borrowed theater, without sets or costumes, and with the actors performing from seats in the audience, was an instant hit. It became the defining moment of Blitzstein's career, and one of the compositions for which he will most be remembered. Although the work could not have been more political, he said, "I'm not writing music-plays of social significance..." Disingenuous? Perhaps. But he knew the power and the force of his music, and he wanted to see history play itself out. And did it ever, in this grand and astounding story of resilience and strength in the face of adversity.

The story of the premiere is complemented by historical audio from 1965 – Chicago radio legend Studs Terkel discusses and sings songs from *The Cradle Will Rock*...with none other than Leonard Bernstein.

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Act 2 – Love and Betrayal

Here's the story of a great composer who has been all but forgotten: Marc Blitzstein. In Episode Two, we'll hear two stories: one about Airplanes, and one about a Southern Belle. But we'll also hear a third story, which is the most compelling of all. How a composer and a student became friends, lovers, rivals, and friends again. This is a story of love and betrayal. This is the story of Marc Blitzstein. The opera Regina is the story of a Southern Belle, who is unrepentant and evil. She will stop at nothing, even murder, to achieve her ends. About Regina, the critic Wilfred Mellers wrote: "Blitzstein's great achievement is that he has imbued technique borrowed from the commercial world with the power to hit back– to stand for, rather than against, the human spirit. His embryonic awareness of emerging life, in his 'low and steady' mood, is the real America, beneath the push and go, the America that is still waiting to be born."

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Act 3 – Mack the Knife on Broadway

Composer Marc Blitzstein was a man who straddled many genres, from classical to Broadway. He could make text and music marry each other in simple and glorious ways. We'll hear Bob Dylan, Louis Armstrong, and Lotte Lenya in this episode, about Blitzstein's brilliant adaptation of Threepenny Opera. Blitzstein's own songwriting was remarkably focused and spare – pared down to the most basic elements – yet with fiery results. One of the highlights of this episode is Marc's friend Paul Robeson, singing "Purest Kind of a Guy." Joshua Schmidt wrote, "How many of us nowadays are willing to put work out into the world in the teeth of forces that will quash and censor it? Who in modern American music and theatrical history offers a greater example of such bravery than Blitzstein?"

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Act 4 – Anarchists at the Opera

Composer Marc Blitzstein wrote engaging, and politically engaged music all his life. In the early 1960's he was commissioned to write an opera for the Met in New York, about Sacco and Vanzetti. Immensely controversial, this opera about anarchists was cut short by his murder – in Martinique. Guests on this episode include Leonard Bernstein's daughter Jamie, and Marc's nephew, Stephen Davis, as well as conductor John Mauceri and opera buff Fred Plotkin. This final episode of this four-part radio series tells the story of the end of Marc's life, and his unfinished 'masterpiece.' (Was it? We will never know.) We also tell the story of the recent revival of his music, and offer some thoughts on what such passionate intensity can mean to us now.