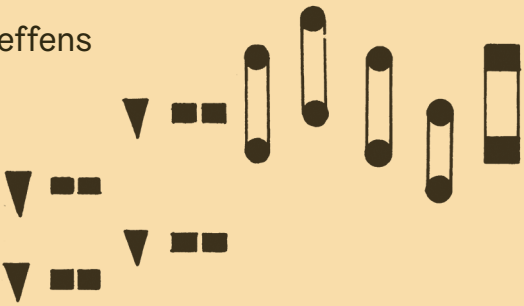


Marc Blitzstein
(1905–1964)

Parabola and
Circula

Bauhaus
Music Vol. 1

Norrköping Symphony
Orchestra
Karl-Heinz Steffens



bauhaus
archiv
museum

Inhalt

Vorwort
Brigitte Franzen
Seite 3
Foreword
Brigitte Franzen
Seite 4

Im Land der Geometrie
Kai Hinrich Müller
und Rebecca Schmid
Seite 6
In the Land of Geometry
Kai Hinrich Müller
and Rebecca Schmid
Seite 17

Libretto
George Whitsett
Seite 28
Impressum
Seite 47



Vorwort

Bauhaus und Musik – das lässt viele Menschen aufhorchen, denn es handelt sich um eine wenig bekannte Schnittstelle der bekannten Kunsthochschule Bauhaus. Das Bauhaus wurde 1919 in Weimar gegründet, war von 1925 bis 1930 in Dessau ansässig und danach bis 1933 in Berlin. Es ist für seine bahnbrechenden Lehrmethoden, seine berühmten Künstlerinnen und Künstler und für Architektur, Design und Kunst weltweit höchst anerkannt. Dass die Schule jedoch auch für Musikerinnen und Musiker ein Magnet gewesen ist, wissen heute nur noch wenige.

Kai Hinrich Müller ist es zu verdanken, dass im Zusammenspiel mit der Pianistin Michal Friedländer und dem Dirigenten Karl-Heinz Steffens nun dieser verlorene Wissensschatz gehoben wird. Daraus ist am Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung unter dem Titel *Bauhaus Music* seit 2023 ein herausragendes Projekt entstanden. Musik- und kunsthistorische Forschung sowie musikalische Praxis reichen sich hierbei die Hand. Das Bauhaus-Archiv arbeitet intensiv an der Veröffentlichung seiner Neuentdeckungen. Geplant ist die Verbreitung der Studien und Erst- beziehungsweise Neueinspielungen als musikalische Dokumente in Form von Konzerten, Streams und einer CD-Edition. Außerdem soll es weitere Publikationen geben, wie das hervorragende, im Jahr 2025 erschienene Buch von Kai Hinrich Müller über die *Musikerinnen und Musiker im Umfeld des Bauhauses*, sowie eine Ausstellung, an deren Inhalten wir gerade feilen.

Den Anfang macht die Oper *Parabola and Circula* von Marc Blitzstein aus dem Jahr 1929. Nach ihrer Uraufführung im Herbst 2025 in der Berliner Philharmonie im Rahmen des Musikfestes wurde das Werk für diese CD eingespielt. Zunächst steht bei *Bauhaus Music* also das Hören im Mittelpunkt. Wir wünschen Ihnen viel Vergnügen und neue Einsichten beim Anhören von Blitzsteins Oper.

Herzlicher Dank gilt allen, die beim Entstehen des Projektes mit Verve und Herzblut mitgearbeitet und damit *Bauhaus Music* aus der Taufe gehoben haben.

Brigitte Franzen,
Direktorin Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung

Foreword

Bauhaus and music – a combination that surprises many people as this was a lesser-known crossover at the famous Bauhaus school of art and design. The Bauhaus was founded in Weimar in 1919, relocated to Dessau in 1925 where it remained until 1930, after which it continued operating in Berlin until 1933. It is renowned throughout the world for its pioneering teaching methods, its famous artists and its works of architecture, design and art. However, few people today are aware that the school was also a magnet for musicians of that time.

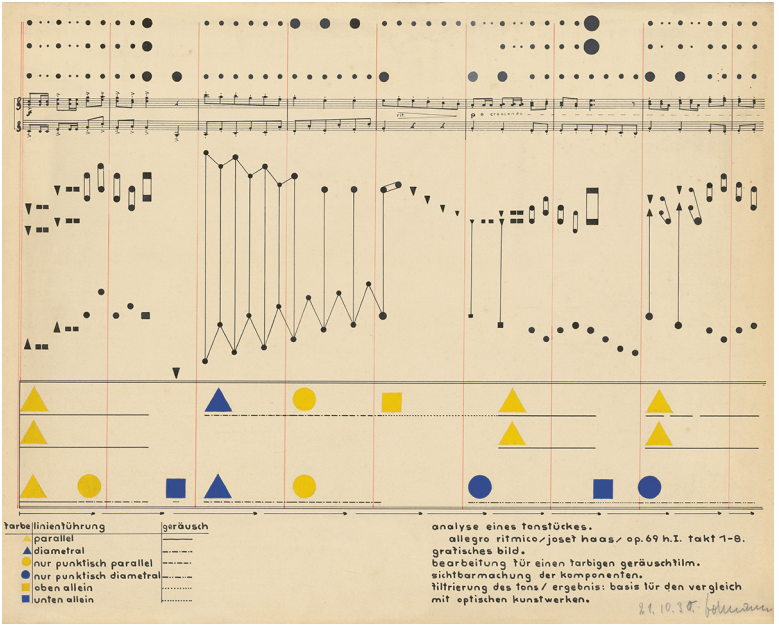
Thanks to Kai Hinrich Müller together with pianist Michal Friedländer and conductor Karl-Heinz Steffens, we have now recovered this storehouse of knowledge. The result is the outstanding project *Bauhaus Music*, initiated by the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung in 2023. It is an undertaking that involves close collaboration between musicologists, art historians and professional musicians. The Bauhaus-Archiv has been working intensively on publishing these newly discovered works. The plan is to distribute these "musical documents" as study editions, first- and debut recordings in the form of concerts, streams and a CD edition. The project also intends to produce further publications, such as the fascinating book by Kai Hinrich Müller in 2025 entitled *Musikerinnen und Musiker im Umfeld des Bauhauses* (The Musicians Affiliated with the Bauhaus), as well as an exhibition, the content of which is still being finalised.

The first piece in this series is the opera *Parabola and Circula*, composed in 1929 by Marc Blitzstein. The piece was recorded for this CD following its world premiere at the Berlin Philharmonie during the Berlin Music Festival in autumn 2025. When it comes to *Bauhaus Music*, it's all about listening. We wish you much enjoyment and new insights as you experience the music of Blitzstein's opera.

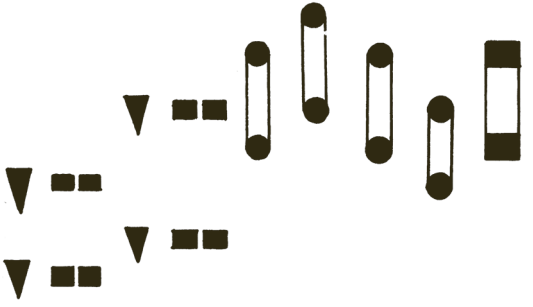
We wish to thank everyone who poured their blood, sweat and tears into this project and have made *Bauhaus Music* a reality.

Brigitte Franzen
Director, Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung

5

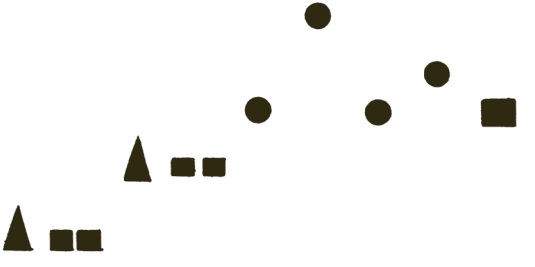


Heinrich Siegfried Bormann, „analyse eines tonstückes.“, 1930,
Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin



Im Land der Geometrie: Marc Blitzsteins Oper Parabola and Circula

im Kontext seines musiktheatralen Schaffens



„Intendant Schulz-Dornburg is (so seems) seriously excited about the opera; he says he would like it for the beginning of next season, and wants to do it in collaboration with the Bauhaus people there. I am to go once again to Dessau tomorrow, when they will give me a complete afternoon session for an audition.“[1] Ziemlich euphorisiert scheint Marc Blitzstein[2] (1905–1964) gewesen zu sein, als er am 28. Januar 1930 an seine Freundin Stella Simon (1878–1973) schreibt, Filmemacherin und Fotografin, und ihr die frohe Kunde bringt, eine Uraufführungsmöglichkeit für sein neuestes Bühnenwerk gefunden zu haben: das Theater in Dessau in Kooperation mit dem dortigen Bauhaus. Sein neuestes Werk – das ist in diesem Fall seine Oper *Parabola and Circula*, die im Zeichen der Geometrie steht, mit dem Herz und Schmerz typischer Opernhandlungen versehen ist und beides in bemerkenswerter Weise zusammenführt. Die vorliegende Einspielung, zugleich Auftakt einer neuen CD-Reihe des Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, präsentiert dieses Werk nun erstmals in Form einer Studioaufnahme, die an die erfolgreiche Premiere der Oper im September 2025 im Zuge von *Bauhaus Music* anknüpft.

Parabola and Circula

Parabola and Circula spielt im Land abstrakter Formen und erzählt eine tragische Geschichte zwischen geometrischen Figuren. Im Mittelpunkt steht das Schicksal von Parabel (Parabola) und Kreis (Circula), den Adoptiveltern von Rechteck (Rectangula) und Punkt (Intersecta). Sie leben glücklich vereint, verlieren sich aber am Ende der Oper mit dem Tod Circulas. Scheint ihre Beziehung zunächst perfekt zu sein, kommt nach und nach der Zweifel in ihr Leben – in Form von Diskussionen mit ihren Freunden Prism, Linea und Geodesa, die über das Beziehungsglück der beiden urteilen. Es beraube sie der Selbstständigkeit und ihr Liebesverhalten sei zudem bedrückend für den modernen Geist, wie es im Libretto heißt. Aus dem wachsenden Zweifel Parabolas entsteht ein schwarzes, pyramidenähnliches Projektil, das Circula am Ende tötet. Der Vorhang fällt,

zurück bleiben die Kinder mit einem Klagegesang. Es sei ein zerstörtes Paradies, das – so Blitzstein und sein Librettist George Whitsett (1889–1979) – hier dargestellt werden solle: Der Mensch zertrümmere, was ihm am nächsten sei. „Parabola – essentially stupid", so Blitzstein, „who bellows joyously at the beginning, and attains personal dignity only through acquiring enough courage at the end to destroy his happiness. His tragedy lies in an unconscious need for a more human and imperfect situation, and the lack of means to combat the doubt which is the instrument, the Frankenstein he has not known he wished."[3]

Die Oper wurde im November 1929 vollendet, als Blitzstein in Salzburg und Cannes auf Reisen war. Erste Skizzen waren einige Monate zuvor in den USA entstanden. Blitzstein war in dieser Zeit regelmäßig in Europa unterwegs, auch im Berlin der Weimarer Republik, der Stadt, der er auf besondere Weise verbunden war. Von dort stammte unter anderem seine Ehefrau Eva Goldbeck (1901–1936), der *Parabola and Circula* gewidmet ist und mit der er trotz seiner Homosexualität ab 1933 verheiratet war. Darüber hinaus bewunderte Blitzstein die Arbeitermusikbewegung und stand mit der „Novembergruppe" in Kontakt, deren Konzerte er mehrfach besuchte. Auch in Paris hatte er die Szene aufgesaugt, lernte dort unter anderem Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) persönlich kennen und besuchte Aufführungen von Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) und von seinem Landsmann George Antheil (1900–1959).

Blitzstein war als Pluralist auf der Suche nach einem wirksamen transatlantischen Stil, was sich unter anderem in seiner Vortrags- und Konzertreihe *The Modern Movement in Music* (1928/29) in Philadelphia und New York zeigt. Hier erkundete er Entwicklungen sowohl in Europa als auch in Russland und Amerika. Auch in *Parabola and Circula* ist die breite Sicht auf die Musikgeschichte präsent, wie sein Biograf Howard Pollack unterstreicht: „The drama inspired from Blitzstein a distinctive sound world [...] with room for diatonic melodies, tonal pedal-points, triadic

harmonies, straightforward dance rhythms, and a variety of chamber-like sonorities, notwithstanding the richly scored ballet complete with harp arpeggios. The result echoes both the classical poise of Gluck's Orpheus and Eurydice, which the composer had seen in Frankfurt in September 1929 [...], and the latest Stravinsky, including Oedipus rex, Apollo, and The Fairy's Kiss, although the score sometimes comes closer to Prokofiev, as in the pas de deux."[4]

Insgesamt umfasst seine durchkomponierte Oper 21 Abschnitte mit zehn Szenen bei rund 60 Minuten an Musik. Dazu gehören zwei Ballette, von denen eines mit Drahtseilen konzipiert ist, mit denen die Tänzer in einer Gruppe über die Bühne fliegen sollen, das andere im Sinne eines klassischen Pas de deux. Seine Oper sei „a bouncing baby, much larger and heavier than I had dreamed. One hour and ten minutes already, and the end only barely in sight!",[5] teilte er seiner Freundin Berenice Skidelsky (1887–1984) mit und fügte zugleich hinzu, dass er sie für die kontinentalen Theater mit Blick auf die übliche Länge von Einaktern kürzen müsse. Das war durchaus weitsichtig, vergleicht man die opulenten Ausmaße des Werks beispielsweise mit den einaktigen Bühnenwerken von Ernst Křenek (1900–1991) oder Kurt Weill (1900–1950). Ergänzend liefert er eine visuelle Konzeption, welche die abstrakte Formenwelt der Handlung gestalterisch aufgreift. Das Libretto gibt Vorschläge für Lichtführung, Bühnenbild und Bewegung, wodurch der Eindruck eines geometrischen Musiktheaters entsteht. Schon der Beginn des Librettoskripts in seinem Nachlass mag mit dem Verweis auf eine „symphony of geometrical planes, lights and shadows" seine visuelle Vorstellungskraft und die seines Librettisten verdeutlichen: „The scene is the stone court on the side ot the rose-bowered home of Parabola and Circula. The house is a symphony of geometrical planes, lights and shadows and the diaphanous flowers grow in multi-shaped clusters appropriate to the World of Forms. When the orange luminary of morning rises it is illiptical and the colored shadows are diversely shaped and strange to human eyes."[6]

Bezüge zum Bauhaus

Blitzsteins Bezug zum Bauhaus ist insgesamt als eher indirekt zu bewerten. Er hat nie an der Institution studiert und sie – nach aktuellem Stand der Recherchen – nicht besucht. Dennoch dürfte Blitzstein die Schule gekannt haben, nicht zuletzt durch seine Berührungspunkte mit der „Novembergruppe“, in der etliche Bauhäusler Mitglied waren. Der wohl stärkste Bezug zum Bauhaus liegt im eingangs zitierten Brief, der herausstellt, dass *Parabola and Circula* in Kollaboration mit dem Bauhaus Dessau uraufgeführt werden sollte – was mit Blick auf Sujet, Handlung und Gestaltung auch naheliegen mag. Der Kontakt scheint durch die Universal Edition hergestellt worden zu sein, die Blitzstein an verschiedene Häuser empfohlen hatte. So heißt es an anderer Stelle im genannten Brief: „I am once again in Berlin [...]. Another reason for coming was the chance to peddle my new opera, ‚Parabola and Circula‘, around. In Wien, I played the work for the Universal-Edition people, who gave me letters to three intendants in Germany. The most hopeful theater seems to be Dessau [...]“ Am 29. Januar 1930 reiste Blitzstein nach Dessau, um die Angelegenheiten seiner Oper weiterzubringen. Auch hier scheint es wahrscheinlich, dass er in diesem Zuge das Bauhaus besucht haben könnte. Trotz Unterstützung des Verlags kam es jedoch nicht zu einer Aufnahme in dessen Programm; auch die Uraufführung fand nicht statt. Möglicherweise lag es an den Ausmaßen des Werks, an den finanziellen Herausforderungen einer Produktion oder an dem sich allmählich verändernden politischen Klima zu Beginn der 1930er-Jahre. Hatte Blitzstein für seinen Einakter *Triple Sec* noch den Schott-Verlag begeistern können, so erfolgte auch in diesem Traditionshaus keine Inverlagnahme mehr. Dabei war der Leumund des Werks gut: Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979), der er *Parabola and Circula* vorgespielt hatte, zeigte sich angetan. Glaubt man darüber hinaus Blitzsteins Äußerungen in einem Brief an Eva Goldbeck, so interessierte sich neben dem Bauhaus in Dessau auch der Dirigenten Fritz Reiner (1888–1963) für die

Oper. Letzterer sei *Parabola and Circula* angeblich verfallen.

Doch am Ende nützte es nichts: Bis zur Wiederentdeckung durch *Bauhaus Music* blieb das Stück ungespielt, zumindest als Ganzes. Nur Teile der Oper fanden Einzug ins Musikleben – im Zuge von *No for an Answer*, *Airborne Symphony* oder *Regina*, für die sich Blitzstein am Material von *Parabola and Circula* bediente.[7] Insgesamt blickte er später auch eher ambivalent auf das Werk zurück, sah gelungene wie allzu lange Stellen, machte sich aber nicht mehr an eine Überarbeitung.

Musiktheater zwischen Politik und Bekenntnis: Kursorischer Überblick über Blitzsteins weiteres Schaffen

Während man *Parabola and Circula* als avanciertes Experiment eines jungen Komponisten sehen kann, lässt sich das Werk zugleich als Auftakt einer kontinuierlichen Auseinandersetzung Blitzsteins mit der Zusammenführung von dramatischer Form und gesellschaftlicher Aussagekraft begreifen. Die im Werk anklingenden Themen – etwa die Dialektik von Individuum und Kollektiv, die Spannung von idealisierter Ordnung und umgebender Wirklichkeit, die Suche nach einem Musiktheater jenseits überlieferter Gattungsgrenzen – gewinnen dabei in seinem späteren Schaffen noch mehr an Tiefe und Dringlichkeit. Zugleich spiegelt sich im Übergang von der geometrisch-abstrakten Welt von *Parabola and Circula* hin zu dezidiert politisch motivierten Werken ein biografischer Wandel, der mit den historischen Umbrüchen der 1930er- bis 1950er-Jahre insgesamt verknüpft ist. In der Folge verlagert sich Blitzsteins Fokus zu einem explizit gesellschaftlich engagierten Musiktheater, der sich in Werken wie *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Regina* oder *Sacco and Vanzetti* artikuliert.

Insbesondere die Musik von Kurt Weill und Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) spielte für Blitzstein eine zentrale Rolle, zumal in seinen Brecht-Kollaborationen. Nicht zuletzt stimmten die sozialpolitischen Dimensionen dieser Werke auch mit seiner Weltanschauung

überein: Als Sohn russisch-jüdischer Eltern wurde der Komponist mit sozialdemokratischen Werten erzogen. Er war überzeugter Kommunist und trat 1938 offiziell der Amerikanischen Kommunistischen Partei bei. Mit Weill hatte er in seiner Berliner Zeit höchstwahrscheinlich keinen direkten Kontakt, sah aber *Die Dreigroschenoper* 1929 in Wiesbaden zusammen mit Aaron Copland (1900–1990) und behauptete drei Jahrzehnte später zudem, er sei von dem Werk nahezu erzogen worden. In seinen Essays für die Zeitschrift *Modern Music* übte er hingegen scharfe Kritik an Weills Kompositionen. „Success has crowned Kurt Weill, with his superbourgeois ditties", schrieb er im Jahr 1933.[8] Doch schon wenig später, zwischen 1935 und 1936, versuchte er, gemeinsam mit Weill englische Versionen von *Der Weg zur Verheißung*, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* und *Die sieben Todsünden* auf die Bühne zu bringen. Erst nach dem Tod des Komponisten 1950 gewann er das Vertrauen von Lotte Lenya (1898–1981) für seine *The Threepenny Opera*. Das 1952 von Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) uraufgeführte Werk wurde zum größten finanziellen Erfolg seines Lebens.

1936, nach Weills Emigration nach New York, äußerte sich Blitzstein zum ersten Mal positiv über dessen populäre Musikästhetik. Im Anschluss an einen Vortrag Weills für die Theatertruppe „The Group Theater" zu dessen Bühnenwerk *Johnny Johnson* in demselben Jahr und kurz nach dem Tod seiner Frau Eva schrieb er das politisch aufgeladene „Play in Music" *The Cradle Will Rock*. Laut einem Bericht der Schriftstellerin Minna Lederman (1896–1995) hatte er eine Nummer davon zuvor schon Brecht am Klavier vorgespielt, der ihn im Anschluss dazu ermutigte, „a whole play" zu verfassen „about all forms of prostitution – the press, the clergy and so on."[9] Die Musik Eislers war in diesem Zusammenhang prägend für die Entstehung des Werks. Nach dem Erscheinen der *Sieben Todsünden* 1933 in Paris verachtete Brecht Weills Bereitschaft, der kommerziellen Theaterindustrie entgegenzukommen, und fand im kommunistisch gesinnten Eisler einen idealen Partner.

1935 wurde Blitzstein Mitglied und eventuell Sekretär des „Composer Collective“, einer Gruppe, die der Kommunistischen Partei Amerikas nahestand und eine eher volksnahe musikalische Ästhetik kultivierte. Eisler, ein ideologisches Vorbild der Bewegung für Arbeitermusik, besuchte im selben Jahr Versammlungen und hielt Vorträge in New York.

In *The Cradle Will Rock* geht es um eine Gewerkschaftsversammlung von Stahlarbeitern in der fiktiven Stadt Steeltown, in der der wohlhabende Mr. Mister mit seinem „Liberty Committee“ alle Menschen auszubeuten droht. Die montageartige Partitur umfasst das Stück *Joe Worker* mit Anklängen an ein Eisler-Kampflied und das stark von der *Dreigroschenoper* geprägte *Nickel under the Foot*, in dem die Prostituierte Moll als eine amerikanische Version der Jenny hervortritt. Die Umstände der Uraufführung 1937 spiegelten sozialpolitische Entwicklungen wider, die auch in der Handlung vorkommen. Als das während des New Deals gegründete „Federal Theater Project“ dem Werk absagte, musste Blitzstein auf ein Orchester verzichten und die Musik selbst am Klavier spielen. Unter Nutzung eines Regiekonzepts des Filmemachers Orson Welles (1915–1985) agierten die Sänger-Darsteller*innen im New Yorker Venice Theater aus dem Publikum heraus. Im Herbst desselben Jahres trat Blitzstein als „Mr. Musiker“ neben Lenya in seiner Radiooper *I've Got the Tune* auf – einer Allegorie auf die Suche des Komponisten nach seiner Rolle in der Gesellschaft: Eine Melodie von Mr. Musiker findet ihre geeignete Textvorlage erst in einem Lied für die Massen. Sein um dieselbe Zeit entstandenes Bühnenwerk *No for an Answer* behandelt die Herausforderungen arbeitsloser griechischer Auswanderer, wurde von ihm aber nie orchestriert. 1940 bis 1941 erstellte er Partituren für die antikapitalistischen Filme *Valley Town* und *Native Land*. Daraufhin wurde er wegen seiner Verbindungen zur Kommunistischen Partei vom FBI unter Beobachtung gestellt. Die *Airborne Symphony* für Sprecher, Tenor, Bariton, Männerchor und Orchester wurde 1944 begonnen, als Blitzstein der Luftwaffe in London beitrat, und zählt laut Howard

Pollack zu seinen anspruchsvollen Konzertwerken. Umso beeindruckender ist es, dass er die Partitur auswendig wiederherstellte, als sie aus Versehen nach seiner Heimreise in England zurückblieb (kurz vor der Uraufführung 1946 mit der New York Symphony unter der Leitung Bernsteins tauchte sie in einer Postsendung in Boston wieder auf).

Während seiner Zeit in England wirkte Blitzstein auch als Musikdirektor der American Broadcasting Station, hielt Vorträge bei der BBC und lernte den Komponisten und Dirigenten Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) kennen. Neben Skizzen für Filmmusikpartituren entstand in dieser Zeit auch *Freedom Morning*, das 1943 vom London Symphony Orchestra und einem „Army Negro Chorus“ uraufgeführt wurde. Das etwa zehnminütige Werk greift auf afroamerikanische Spirituals zurück, die auch zu einem wichtigen Element in seiner Oper *Regina* wurden. Diese entstand zwischen 1946 und 1949 und war in den Augen Bernsteins, Coplands und des Komponisten und Kritikers Virgil Thomson (1896–1989) ein bedeutender Schritt in Richtung einer amerikanischen Operntradition, die Impulse von Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) bis Weill aufnahm, gleichzeitig aber auch Jazz, Ragtime und Spirituals miteinander verflocht. Wie im Großteil seiner Bühnenwerke fertigte Blitzstein das Libretto selbst an, nach dem Schauspiel *The Little Foxes* von Lillian Hellman (1905–1984), die Bernsteins Mitarbeiterin in seiner komischen Operette *Candide* war. Erzählt wird in *Regina* von einer ehrgeizigen Hausfrau aus Alabama, die ihre finanziellen Interessen um jeden Preis vorantreiben will und so lieblos mit der eigenen Familie umgeht, dass ihr Mann vor ihren Augen an einem Herzinfarkt stirbt.

Die unvollendete Oper *Sacco and Vanzetti* wäre schließlich wohl Blitzsteins Opus magnum geworden. In ihr vertont er die wahre Geschichte von zwei italienischen Einwanderern, die 1927 zum Tod auf dem elektrischen Stuhl verurteilt wurden – drei Jahrzehnte später wurde ihre Unschuld bewiesen. Nach Blitzsteins Tod im Jahr 1964 infolge eines Angriffs von drei Seemännern auf der Insel Martinique wurde die Partitur im Kofferraum

seines Autos gefunden. Gespräche über eine mögliche Produktion hatte er schon mit Rudolf Bing (1902–1997) geführt, dem Intendanten der Metropolitan Opera. Die Oper wäre möglicherweise wegen des umstrittenen Inhalts jedoch nicht aufgeführt worden. Die vollendete Version des Komponisten und Blitzstein-Experten Leonard Lehrman (*1949) wurde erst 2001 in Connecticut uraufgeführt und 2022 am Lehman College in New York inszeniert. Ebenfalls vervollständigte Lehrman die einaktige Oper *Idiots First* aus dem unvollendeten Projekt *The Tales of Malamud*.

Schlussbetrachtung

Blitzsteins Musiktheaterwerke sind heute nur punktuell im Musikleben vertreten. *The Cradle Will Rock* ist hauptsächlich an amerikanischen Universitäten zu sehen, *Regina* wurde zwar in den 1950er-Jahren erfolgreich an der New York City Opera inszeniert, das Haus musste aber 2011 seine Türen schließen. *Triple Sec* wurde 2015 immerhin am Berliner Konzerthaus gespielt und das Orchestra Miami, eine eher kleine, gemeinschaftsorientierte Institution, nahm 2022 die *Airborne Symphony* neben Weills *Der Lindberghflug* ins Programm auf. Dass Blitzstein nur bedingt als Komponist anerkannt ist – auch in seinem Heimatland –, mag sich dabei durch einige Faktoren erklären lassen: seine politische Haltung; die mangelnde Infrastruktur an öffentlichen Theatern und Opernhäusern in den USA; die Repertoireauslassungen, die das Musiktheater des 20. Jahrhunderts bis heute prägen; und die Tatsache, dass er zu jung gestorben ist, um seinen Stil zur vollen Geltung zu bringen beziehungsweise um alle Bühnenprojekte zu verwirklichen. Ob Blitzstein das amerikanische Musiktheater anders hätte lenken können, bleibt unklar. Für die amerikanische Schriftstellerin Joan Peyser (1930–2011) verkörpert er das „Dilemma“, dass er „weder provinziell noch ein Genie“ war.[10] In jedem Fall diente Blitzstein als eine wichtige Brückenfigur über den Atlantik und forderte im Sinne von Weill eine ausdrücklich amerikanische, aber sozialpolitisch verhaftete Tradition, die den Weg für

Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim (1930–2021) und andere Komponisten bahnte.

Kai Hinrich Müller und Rebecca Schmid

Der vorliegende Text ist die gekürzte Fassung eines Originalbeitrags für den Essayband „Musikerinnen und Musiker im Umfeld des Bauhauses“, herausgegeben von Kai Hinrich Müller für das Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin 2025. Die Publikation kann gratis unter www.bauhaus.de heruntergeladen werden.

1 Brief von Marc Blitzstein an Stella Simon, 28. Januar 1930, Marc Blitzstein, Letters, 1927–1944, Northwestern University Libraries, Folder .B54, Box: 1.

2 Vgl. zu Blitzstein die beiden Biografien: Howard Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein. His Life, His Work*, His World, Oxford 2015; Eric A. Gordon, *Mark the Music. The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein*, New York 1989. Zudem mit Blick auf Blitzsteins Musiktheater: Rebecca Schmid, *Weill, Blitzstein, and Bernstein*. A Study of Influence, Rochester 2023.

3 Zitiert nach Pollack 2015, S. 78 f.

4 Ebd., S. 79.

5 Ebd., S. 77.

6 Vgl. das Skript von *Parabola and Circula*, S. 1, in: Box/Folder 28/8, Reel/Frame 43/133, in: U.S. MSS 35AN/Micro 1049, Historical Society Archives/Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

7 Blitzstein schreibt auf der Titelseite des Klavierauszugs: „This work, never performed, has been used by me as my ‚composer trunk‘ – a sort of repository in which to dip for material for later works. Parts are to be found in ‚No for an Answer‘, ‚The Airborne‘, ‚Regina‘, a ballet pas-de-deux, ‚Lear: a Study‘“, in: Box/Folder 77/1, Reel/Frame 43/450 ff., in U.S. MSS 35AN/Micro 1049, Historical Society Archives/Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater.

8 Marc Blitzstein, „On Mahagonny“, in: The Saturday Review, 31. Mai 1958, S. 40

9 Marc Blitzstein, „Popular Music – An Invasion: 1923–1933“, in: *Modern Music* X/2 (1933), S. 101.

10 Minna Lederman: „Memories of Marc Blitzstein, Music’s Angry Man“, in: Show 6 (1964), S. 22. Vgl. Pollack 2015, S. 106.

11 „Precisely because he was neither parochial nor a genius […]“, in: Joan Peyser, *The Music of My Time*, London 1995, S. 117. Übersetzung: Rebecca Schmid.

In the Land of Geometry: Marc Blitzstein's Opera *Parabola and Circula* in the Context of his Music Theatre

"Intendant Schulz-Dornburg is (so seems) seriously excited about the opera; he says he would like it for the beginning of next season, and wants to do it in collaboration with the Bauhaus people there. I am to go once again to Dessau tomorrow, when they will give me a complete afternoon session for an audition."[1] In a letter to his friend, filmmaker and photographer Stella Simon (1878–1973) on 28 January 1930, Marc Blitzstein (1905–1964)[2] sounded almost euphoric, relaying the good news that he had found a stage interested in debuting his latest musical work – the theatre in Dessau, in cooperation with the Bauhaus Dessau. The piece in question was his *Parabola and Circula*, an opera about geometrical beings that carries forth the longing and heartbreak typical of operatic narratives in an original way. The following recording – the first in a new CD series produced by the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung – presents this work for the first time as a studio recording that was created subsequent to the opera's successful premiere in September 2025 at the *Bauhaus Music* festival.

Parabola and Circula

Parabola and Circula is set in a land of abstract shapes and tells the tragic story of two geometric figures. The main plot focuses on the fate of Parabola (a parabola) and Circula (a circle) and the adoptive parents of Rectangula (a rectangle) and Intersecta (a point). They all live happily together until they lose each other at the end of the opera following Circula's death. Although their relationship seems perfect at first, their life is gradually cast in doubt following discussions with their friends Prism, Linea and Geodesa, who view the happiness in their relationship with skepticism. In the libretto, they assert that the relationship is depriving Parabola and Circula of their independence, and that their expressions of love are an imposition on modern sensibilities. Parabola's growing doubt solidifies into a black, pyramid-like projectile that ultimately

kills Circula. The curtain falls to the sound of the children lamenting their loss. According to Blitzstein and his librettist George Whitsett (1889–1979), the opera depicts a paradise that is destroyed. The characters end up crushing that which is dearest to them. "Parabola – essentially stupid", as Blitzstein describes him, "who bellows joyously at the beginning, and attains personal dignity only through acquiring enough courage at the end to destroy his happiness. His tragedy lies in an unconscious need for a more human and imperfect situation, and the lack of means to combat the doubt which is the instrument, the Frankenstein he has not known he wished."[3]

Blitzstein finished the opera in November 1929 during travels to Salzburg and Cannes. He had already completed the initial drafts several months earlier in the United States. Blitzstein travelled regularly through Europe at the time, also to Berlin of the Weimar Republic, a city to which he was especially attached. Berlin was also where his wife Eva Goldbeck (1901-1936) had her roots. It was to her that he dedicated *Parabola and Circula* and with whom he remained married since 1933 despite his homosexuality. Blitzstein was also a big fan of the labour music movement and cultivated contacts with the "Novembergruppe", whose concerts he attended multiple times. He also immersed himself in the Parisian scene where he personally met renowned musicians such as Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) and attended performances by Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) and his compatriot George Antheil (1900–1959).

Blitzstein was above all a pluralist in search of a compelling transatlantic style. His lecture and concert series *The Modern Movement in Music* (1928/29) in Philadelphia and New York explored developments not only in Europe, but in Russia and America as well. This broad view of music history is evident in *Parabola and Circula*, as Blitzstein's biographer Howard Pollack points out: "The drama inspired from Blitzstein a distinctive sound world [...] with room for diatonic melodies, tonal pedal-points, triadic harmonies, straightforward dance

rhythms, and a variety of chamber-like sonorities, notwithstanding the richly scored ballet complete with harp arpeggios. The result echoes both the classical poise of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, which the composer had seen in Frankfurt in September 1929 [...], and the latest Stravinsky, including *Oedipus rex*, *Apollo*, and *The Fairy's Kiss*, although the score sometimes comes closer to Prokofiev, as in the pas de deux."[4]

The fully composed opera contains 21 sections with ten scenes, totalling approximately 60 minutes of music. This includes two ballets, one of which has the dancers floating across stage from wire cables, while the other resembles a classical *pas de deux*. His opera was "a bouncing baby, much larger and heavier than I had dreamed. One hour and ten minutes already, and the end only barely in sight!",[5] he told his friend Berenice Skidelsky (1887–1984), adding that in view of continental theatre conventions, he would have to shorten it to the typical length of a one-act play. It was a keen observation, especially compared to the rather opulent dimensions of other one-acters, for example by Ernst Křenek (1900–1991) and Kurt Weill (1900–1950). The opera also features a visual concept that echoes the abstract "world of forms" in the story. The libretto itself offers suggestions on lighting, set design and movement which create the impression of a geometrical music theatre piece. Indeed, the libretto in his archived estate refers to a "symphony of geometrical planes, lights and shadows", underscoring his visually vibrant concept and that of his librettist: "The scene is the stone court on the side of the rose-bowered home of Parabola and Circula. The house is a symphony of geometrical planes, lights and shadows and the diaphanous flowers grow in multi-shaped clusters appropriate to the World of Forms. When the orange luminary of morning rises it is elliptical and the colored shadows are diversely shaped and strange to human eyes."[6]

Connections to the Bauhaus

Blitzstein's connection to the Bauhaus came in a roundabout way. He never studied at the

institution and, based on the current state of research, never even visited it. Nevertheless, we can assume Blitzstein was familiar with the school, not least through his interactions with the "Novembergruppe", to which several members of the Bauhaus belonged. Perhaps the most salient connection to the Bauhaus can be found in the letter quoted above, where he mentions the potential collaboration with the Bauhaus Dessau in staging the world premiere of *Parabola and Circula* – which also seems plausible considering its subject, plot and concept. The contact was likely arranged through the publisher Universal Edition, which had been trying to find a buyer for Blitzstein's work. In a different section of the above-mentioned letter, he writes: "I am once again in Berlin [...]. Another reason for coming was the chance to peddle my new opera, 'Parabola and Circula', around. In Wien, I played the work for the Universal-Edition people, who gave me letters to three intendants in Germany. The most hopeful theater seems to be Dessau [...]" On 29 January 1930 Blitzstein travelled to Dessau with hopes of further promoting his opera. It is conceivable that he used the occasion to visit the Bauhaus during his stay. Despite the support of his publisher, the Bauhaus decided against including the opera in its programme; it never had its world premiere. This might have been due to its rather extensive scope; the financial challenges the production posed; or the gradually changing political climate at the beginning of the 1930s. Although the Schott-Verlag had been excited by Blitzstein's one-acter *Triple Sec*, he had no luck getting this storied publisher similarly enthused by *Parabola and Circula*. And that despite having a solid reference: Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979), for whom he auditioned *Parabola and Circula*, appeared quite impressed. If we are to believe Blitzstein's remarks in his letter to Eva Goldbeck, then not only did the Bauhaus Dessau show interest in the opera. The conductor Fritz Reiner (1888–1963) apparently had fallen in love with *Parabola and Circula*.

But in the end, it was all for nought. Until it was rediscovered by the *Bauhaus Music* project, the piece remained unperformed – at least

as a whole. Individual parts of the opera had found their way into musical life, for example, in *No for an Answer*, *Airborne Symphony* and *Regina*, for which Blitzstein borrowed material from *Parabola and Circula*.[7] In hindsight, he viewed the piece somewhat ambivalently, conceding that some sections worked well while others were much too long. Ultimately, he never undertook a revision of the work.

Music theatre between politics and conviction: A brief overview of Blitzstein's subsequent works

While *Parabola and Circula* can be viewed as an advanced experiment by a young composer, we can also interpret it as the start of Blitzstein's ongoing attempts to combine dramatic form with a social message. The themes addressed in the piece – the dialectics of the individual and the collective, the tension between idealised order and the given reality, the search for a music theatrical form beyond the traditional constructs of the genre – take on a more profound and urgent role in his later works. At the same time, his transition from the geometrically abstract world of *Parabola and Circula* to decidedly politically motivated works is reflected in his own biographical development, which was shaped in large part by the historic upheavals of the 1930s to the 1950s. As a result, Blitzstein's subsequent music theatre pieces began focusing on overtly socially relevant themes, articulated in such works as *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Regina* and *Sacco and Vanzetti*.

The music by Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) played a central role in Blitzstein's development, in particular through their collaborations with Brecht. The sociopolitical dimensions of these works neatly aligned with his worldview. As the son of Russian-Jewish parents, Blitzstein was raised with social-democratic values. He was a convinced communist, officially joining the Communist Party USA in 1938. Although he most likely had no direct contact with Weill during his time in Berlin, he did see *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) in Wiesbaden in 1929, together with Aaron

Copland (1900–1990). Three decades later he claimed "I practically went to school to the Dreigroschenoper"[8]. And yet in his essays for the journal *Modern Music*, he sharply criticised Weill's compositions. "Success has crowned Kurt Weill, with his superbourgeois ditties", he wrote in 1933.[9] Just a few years later, between 1935 and 1936, he tried collaborating with Weill to produce English stage versions of *Der Weg zur Verheißung* (*The Eternal Road*), *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (*The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*) and *Die sieben Todsünden* (*The Seven Deadly Sins*). It was only after the composer's death in 1950 that Lotte Lenya (1898–1981) placed her trust in Blitzstein and his version of *The Threepenny Opera*. Directed by Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990), the piece premiered in 1952 and became the greatest financial success of Blitzstein's life.

In 1936, following Weill's emigration to New York, Blitzstein for the first time expressed a positive view of Weill's popular music aesthetic. After attending a lecture by Weill for the players of the "The Group Theater" on his stage piece *Johnny Johnson* that same year (and shortly after the death of his wife Eva), Blitzstein wrote the politically charged "play in music" *The Cradle Will Rock*. According to a report by the writer Minna Lederman (1896–1995), he performed one of the numbers on the piano for Brecht, who then encouraged him to write "a whole play about all forms of prostitution – the press, the clergy and so on."[10] Eisler's music no doubt played an influential role in the development of this piece. After *The Seven Deadly Sins* debuted in 1933 in Paris, Brecht disparaged Weill's readiness to cooperate with players in the commercial theatre industry and found an ideal partner in the communist-minded Eisler. In 1935 Blitzstein became a member and eventually secretary of the "Composer Collective", a group closely associated with the Communist Party USA that cultivated populist ideals. Eisler, an ideological role model for the labour music movement, attended several conferences that same year and held lectures in New York.

The Cradle Will Rock takes place in the fictive city of Steeltown on the

evening of a steel workers' union drive. The wealthy Mr. Mister has created a "Liberty Committee" that threatens to exploit the city's residents. The montage-like score includes the number *Joe Worker* evoking elements of an Eisler *Kampflied* (battle song), while the song *Nickel under the Foot* has strong shades of Jenny from *The Threepenny Opera*. The circumstances of *Cradle's* world premiere in 1937 mirrored sociopolitical developments of the time, which also resurface in the plot. When the "Federal Theatre Project" – established as part of the New Deal – refused to fund the piece, Blitzstein had to forego an orchestra and play the score himself from the piano. Under a directorial concept conceived by the filmmaker Orson Welles (1915–1985), the singer-actors performed among members of the audience in the New York Venice Theatre. In the autumn of that year, Blitzstein performed alongside Lenya as "Mr. Musiker" in his radio opera *I've Got the Tune* – an allegory for the composer's search for his role in society. Mr. Musiker finally hits upon a suitable text for a melody by writing a song for the masses. Blitzstein also wrote the stage piece *No for an Answer* about the challenges facing unemployed Greek immigrants around that same time but never orchestrated it. From 1940 to 1941 he composed scores for the anti-capitalistic films *Valley Town* and *Native Land*, after which he was placed under surveillance by the FBI due to his connections with the Communist party. Blitzstein began composing the *Airborne Symphony* for narrator, tenor, baritone, men's chorus and orchestra in 1944 shortly after enlisting with the air force in London. According to Pollack, it counts among his most ambitious concert pieces. It is thus all the more impressive that Blitzstein reconstructed the score entirely from memory after accidentally leaving it behind in England when he returned home (shortly following its world premiere under Bernstein, in 1946 with the New York Symphony, the score resurfaced in Boston in the mail.)

During his time in England, Blitzstein also served as music director of the American Broadcasting Station,

held lectures at the BBC and became acquainted with the composer and conductor Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958). In addition to producing sketches for film scores, he also wrote *Freedom Morning*, performed for the first time in 1943 by the London Symphony Orchestra and an "Army Negro Chorus". The approximately ten-minute piece draws on African American spirituals which also featured significantly in his opera *Regina*. Composed between 1946 and 1949, Bernstein, Copland and the composer and critic Virgil Thomson (1896–1989) all agreed that *Regina* represented an important step in the direction of an American opera tradition, comprising impulses from Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) to Weill while interleaving elements of jazz, ragtime and spirituals. As with most of his stage works, Blitzstein wrote the libretto himself, based on the play *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman (1905–1984), who had worked together with Bernstein in his comic operetta *Candide*. *Regina* tells the story of an ambitious housewife from Alabama who will stop at nothing to pursue her financial interests. Her relationship to her own family is so heartless that her husband dies of a heart attack right in front of her.

The unfinished opera *Sacco and Vanzetti* would have likely become Blitzstein's *opus magnum*. In the piece, he sets to music the true story of two Italian immigrants who were sentenced to death at the electric chair and posthumously proven innocent three decades later. Following Blitzstein's death in 1964 after being beaten by three sailors on the island of Martinique, the score was found in the rear storage of his car. He had been in talks about the possibility of a production at the Metropolitan Opera with the house's general director Rudolf Bing (1902–1997) – a prospect that likely would not have come to fruition given the work's controversial content. The completed version by the composer and Blitzstein expert Leonard Lehrman (*1949) debuted in Connecticut in 2001 and was performed again at Lehman College in New York in 2022. Lehrman also completed the one-act opera *Idiots First* using material from the unfinished project *The Tales of Malamud*.

Concluding observations

Blitzstein's music theatre works are only occasionally found on today's musical landscape. *The Cradle Will Rock* is mainly staged at American universities. The New York City Opera produced a successful run of *Regina* in the 1950s (the company of had to shut its doors in 2011). *Triple Sec* was recently performed at the Berlin Konzerthaus in 2015, and the Miami Symphony Orchestra – a rather small, community-oriented institution, featured the *Airborne Symphony* together with Weill's *Der Lindberghflug* – (*The Lindbergh Flight*) in 2022. That Blitzstein remains a little-known composer – also in his native country – may be attributed to a range of complex factors: his political stance; the meagre infrastructure for public theatres and opera houses in the USA; the relative neglect of the 20th-century repertoire in opera houses; and the fact that he died too young before he could reach his full potential as a composer, namely before realising all the stage projects he had begun. Whether Blitzstein could have steered American music theatre in a new, more progressive direction remains a matter of debate. For the American writer Joan Peyser (1930–2011), Blitzstein embodied the dilemma that he was "neither parochial nor a genius"[11]. Blitzstein nevertheless served to bridge music theatre on both sides of the Atlantic, promoting – in the spirit of Weill – an explicitly American, socio-politically anchored tradition that paved the way for Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim (1930–2021) and other composers to come.

Kai Hinrich Müller and Rebecca Schmid

The text above is a slightly shortened version of an original article, published in a collection of essays entitled “Musikerinnen und Musiker im Umfeld des Bauhauses”, edited by Kai Hinrich Müller for the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin in 2025. The publication can be downloaded for free from www.bauhaus.de

1 Letter by Marc Blitzstein to Stella Simon, 28 January 1930, Marc Blitzstein, Letters, 1927–1944, Northwestern University Libraries, Folder .B54, Box: 1.

2 Cf. the two biographies on Blitzstein: Howard Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein. His Life, His Work*, His World, Oxford 2015; Eric A. Gordon, *Mark the Music. The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein*, New York 1989. With respect to Blitzstein’s music theatre work, see: Rebecca Schmid, *Weill, Blitzstein, and Bernstein. A Study of Influence*, Rochester 2023.

3 As quoted in Pollack, 2015, p. 78f.

4 Ibid., p. 79.

5 Ibid., p. 77.

6 Cf. the script of *Parabola and Circula*, p. 1, in: Box/Folder 28/8, Reel/Frame 43/ 133, in: U.S. MSS 35AN/Micro 1049, Historical Society Archives/ Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

7 Blitzstein wrote on the title page of the piano score: “This work, never performed, has been used by me as my ‘composer trunk’ – a sort of repository in which to dip for material for later works. Parts are to be found in ‘No for an Answer’, ‘The Airborne’, ‘Regina’, a ballet pas-de-deux, ‘Lear: a Study’”, in: Box/Folder 77/1, Reel/Frame 43/450 ff., in U.S. MSS 35AN/ Micro 1049, Historical Society Archives/Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater.

8 Marc Blitzstein, “On Mahagonny”, in: *The Saturday Review*, 31 May 1958, p. 40.

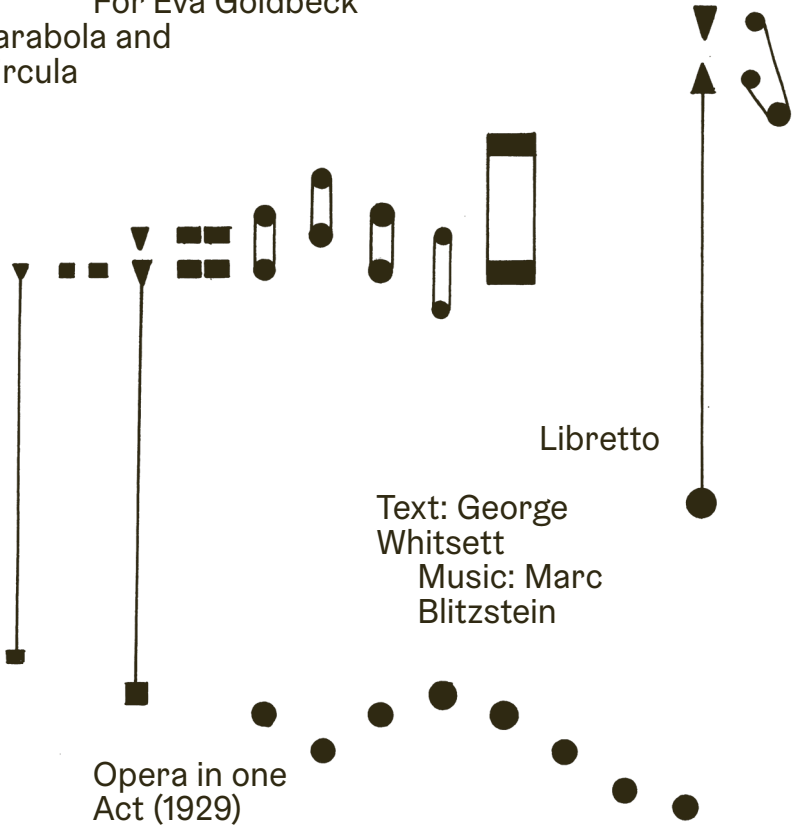
9 Marc Blitzstein, “Popular Music – An Invasion: 1923–1933”, in: Modern Music X/2 (1933), p. 101.

10 Minna Lederman: “Memories of Marc Blitzstein, Music’s Angry Man”, in: Show 6 (1964), p. 22. Cf. Pollack 2015, p. 106.

11 In: Joan Peyser, *The Music of My Time*, London 1995, p. 117.

For Eva Goldbeck

Parabola and Circula



Libretto

Text: George Whitsett

Music: Marc Blitzstein

Opera in one Act (1929)

Characters

Parabola: baritone
Circula: soprano

Their adopted children
Rectangula: tenor
Intersecta: soprano

Prism: tenor
Linea: contralto
Geodesa: bass-baritone

Ballet (group: two solo dancers)

Index

1. Prelude
2. Rectangula, Intersecta
3. Ballet. Rectangula, Intersecta, Parabola, Circula
4. Intersecta, Rectangula, Parabola
5. Circula (aria)
6. Circula, Intersecta, Rectangula, Parabola
7. Ritual. Pas de deux.
8. Rectangula, Intersecta, Circula
9. Rectangula, Intersecta, Prism
10. Parabola, Prism, Intersecta, Rectangula
11. Parabola, Prism, Intersecta, Rectangula
12. Prism (quasi aria)
13. Parabola (quasi aria)
14. Linea, Parabola
15. Parabola, Intersecta, Rectangula, Linea
16. Geodesa, Linea, Intersecta, Parabola, Circula
17. Prism, Parabola, Geodesa
18. Intersecta, Rectangula, Linea
19. Parabola, Geodesa, Prism, Linea, Intersecta, Rectangula
20. Finale – Circula, Parabola, Intersecta, Rectangula
21. Orchestra

2 Flutes, 1 Piccolo (poi Flute 3), 2 Oboes, 1 English Horn (poi Oboe 3), 2 Clarinets, B-b, 1 Bass-Clarinet, B-b (pou Clarinet 3), 2 Bassoons, 1 Contra-Bassoon (poi Bassoon 3), 4 Horns, F, 3 Trumpets, C, 3 Trombones, 1 Bass-Tuba

2 Harps, Timpany, Percussion (Bass-drum, Cymbals, Snare-drum, Tambourine, Celesta, Xylophone, Jingle-bells, Triangle, Woodblock)

Strings: Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Celli, Contrabassi

Prelude.

Curtain. Scene – The stone court on the side of the home of Parabola and Circula. Intersecta enters from invisibility, and does a dance among the disappearing shrubs and trees. Rectangula pauses for a moment upon the stone shadow.

Rectangula
Sister, my own sister, Intersecta, where have you gone? The stones on the stairway were warm. Where have you gone? You cannot hide from my watchful eyes. Do not be silent, dawn is in the sky. Come. The lovers must be blissful. We must polish the well. We must herald the dawn. We must laugh when they come. Where have you gone?

Intersecta makes a pattern of leaps in the silence of partial light, then hides from him again.

You cannot hide from my watchful eyes. The lovers are stirring in their nest. The harsh webs of day are unfolding. Sister, we must polish the well
for them ... For our parents, the pluperfect lovers.

Intersecta still concealed from him.

Intersecta
O Rectangula, your strong voice echoes from the trapezial wind. But do not sneer at them. They are two budding branches of a tree, weighted to the ground with flowers. The fragrance of their blooming is so intense. They sway nimbly from too much ardor and from bowls so overflowing with desire. Brother, do not rend them.
They are compositional beauty.

Rectangula
I hold no lore sacred from my analytical smile. But it is gentle ... This morning it is so mild. Sister! We cannot keep the sun from rising and with it those two beauties for whom we slave. Willingly, mind you, from presumed adoration and love. Intersecta, bring the bronze powder. Let us make the well more shining than any other in the world of forms. Too bright, let us make it. Like their love.

Intersecta
No, monstrous male. No love is too bright, if it is beautiful.

Runs leaning forward and points at him.

Look at your hands. Why are they so tight?

Touches his chest, near the arms.

Look at your breast, why it is so tight? The sockets of your brain are so tight. Do not be offended, dear, sometimes you seem nearly willing, in your niggard unwillingness to let things appear.

Rectangula
You are right, little sister, gentle voice of the azure dove. You nurture improbable dreams until they are more real than we are. Let us assume theirs is the perfect love and thus restore perfection to our assuming. But let us work, with morning work, with morning work ...

Both approach the well.



Intersecta

Sprinkling powder on the stone settle of the well.

Work that always is a pleasure. Spreading the creative effulgence of beauty ...

Intersecta & Rectangula

As they polish the slab and the tall graceful shaft of the well, the glowing illumination of dawn grows swiftly.

Dark Plethora of shadows, dim sounds of night, fall away into the deepest dells. When the disc of fire floats in the sky they will rise with the glow of loveliness on their lashes, with the dawn light on their shoulders. Each morning a new world of love is born.

Both leap up, run to the horizon and climb to the top of the wall, seeming to hold an invisible hoop.
As they do so, the fiery orange ellipsis swings upward into view, changing all interspaces into shafts and patterns of color. They turn about and look towards the court.

Intersecta
Come out tenderly into another day, look into each other's eyes.

Rectangula
All we erogenous flowers

Intersecta
Are the children of your interlingual hours.

Rectangula
Here, under the sureness of the sky

Intersecta
Hide the purity of unseen desires.

Both kneel on the wall.

Parabola (off stage)
Circula!

Appears.

Circula (off stage)
Parabola!

Appears.

Ballet.

Enter men.

Parabola

Among the color patterns of the stone retreats.

Winging butterfly of delight, you cannot elude my intuition. I follow you through the dissonances of the universe by following the beams of my desire. You are my holy flame, upright and tenaciously burning. You are the only reality in ephemeral days.

Enter women.

Circula
I know a zealous Lord in whom I hide all of my forms.

Intersecta
Oh, how adorable such trust and dependence. Our race has not evolved in vain to produce such flawless contours.

Rectangula
Not a stone in the liquid of longing, not a wail in the percussion of love.

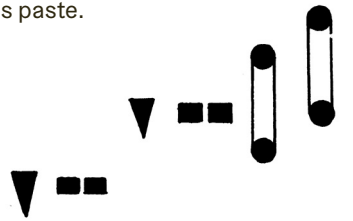
Parabola
If I could not find you, in any nook or bower, I would look only for my grave. Did you speak to me, Circula? Or was it a remembered intoxication?

Circula
Without you, I would fall headlong through the dizzy spaces.

Parabola
My ears are wended with the tenacles of love, every moment in the orbit of time. Without you, I would not fall. I would disappear, exist only in oblivion.

Intersecta
There, in the azure breast of the wall, is the sweetest power of infinity.

Rectangula
Not a stone in the liquid of longing, not a beam that comes not from above. I accept it as an omen of experience, tremendous and tenuous as paste.



Parabola
Oh wait for me, darling, on the bench by the wild azaleas. I wish to coralize you in vision

In the flower-filtered air of dawn! Wait for me by the pedestal of

morning, while the waterfall of light flashes in your eyes, one the color of amber, the other the green gates of mist. Those dissimilar eyes are emblems of your mystical, asymmetrical being. I fly through space to find you there, enthroned in morning splendor.

Circula
Here I am! Here I am! Here I am, master of my vision, oh, here! oh, here! I am! waiting for you, waiting! on the dappled fawn behind the trees ...



They meet on the concealed balcony.

Parabola
Ah! More beauteous than I had ever dreamed. Let me hold you like a subsequent thought, aways more regal because of an infinitude of disquieting love.

Circula
Ah, beloved!

Parabola
Beloved!

Parabola & Circula
Beloved!

Exit Ballet.

Intersecta
If we were their real children, if we were born of them, we might rupture that rare divination. Rectangula, aren't you grateful that we were adopted by these geniuses of love?

Rectangula
So much beauty perplexes me. I am an unnatural child, a waif, found in their early nuptial floating of the forgotten sea of doom. I am aseptical to this growth of passion, consider it a premonition, the towering of some wave that will wash us all away.

Intersecta
No! You see too much. All that is and all that is not you see. Your dangerous vision encompasses all that could happen, as well as all that will.



Rectangula
I am always chilled by the frigidity of early dawn. In crossing the river between sleep and day, I lose the touch of any friendly hand. Each morning's mission is a cool, resourceless reprimand.

Intersecta
I pity you; but I love you, Rectangula.

Rectangula
There is no longer any room for love. They have used it all.

Parabola
Circula, dear, let me find the bracing light of dawn. I am drunk with the mission of love.

Circula
No, don't go. Yes, let me go ahead of you and warm the air for your coming. Let me prepare the stones for the scarcely perceptible touch of your feet. I always wish to appear to lead. It's a harmless fancy. All the world knows that you are the god.

Slowly descents.

I love you with the intensity of joy. If there were gods, I would pray to them to preserve you until I die. You who have all of the fire of the universe, you leave me stinging and amazed at so much grandeur.

Oh, dear children, you brought up the sun as usual. We were fortunate to have the wisdom to claim you. You have polished the flowers, and every leaf is gleaming.

Intersecta
We adore you, mother. You are more beautiful every day. When my father, the shepherd, died of grief because there were no sheep, you rescued me from wandering among the treeless mountains.

Rectangula
You are more wonderful than the oblivion you brought us from. I would have been drowned in nostalgia and death if you had not saved me from the sea.

Circula
You add many cycles to our compassion. If we seem forgetful, now that you are here, it is only because of obsession with ourselves.

Rectangula
We understand. Our mission is to embroider the universe's first perfection.

Parabola
Good morning, impish children. We thank you for another sun. It seeks out each indivisible form. I would have your minds grow by intuition. ... All of the shapes, however, febrile are attributable to your sun. In the lazy throes of night, visibleness languishes.

Rectangula
While helpless in the hold of night, I see forms circling the vast pole. Terrifying beards,

like icicles. Unfriendly eyes like stars.

Intersecta
No, Papa. His invention takes up all kinds of forbidden images. But he belongs to us.

Parabola
Yes, children, be happy as your parents are.

Circula
We are suffused with the inimitable passion of delight.

Parabola
Circula, mistress of forms, prepare your smoothest thoughts for this our greatest day.
I feel hallowed when I view your awesome beauty. Even your eyes, you show no mediocrity of convention. Each glance from you is different from all others in the world. Oh, I love you so intensely.

Rectangula
Not a cloud in the sky of expectancy. Not a lee to the seaward of love. They stand alone in the procession of longing. No one knows their fitful glows.

Enter two dancers.
Pas de deux (ritual)

Intersecta and Rectangula bury Parabola and Circula among the flowers.

Rectangula
Circula, when I see you, I, too, love you.

Intersecta
Parabola, when you are away, I adore you in memory.

Both run in a skittish dance.

Intersecta &
Rectangula
We called them by their names, Parabola! Circula! Circula! Parabola! We are not their real children. Not we. We came from the sea, and the tawny wild mountains. We know what it is to ache and to deny with the death of desire. They make me want you. They make me hungry to give.

They approach and engage in an eager embrace, kissing greedily. Frightened, they draw away a little. The great gate opens.

Prism! Prism!

Int. and Rec. ascend to a second plane.

Prism! Prism! Prism!

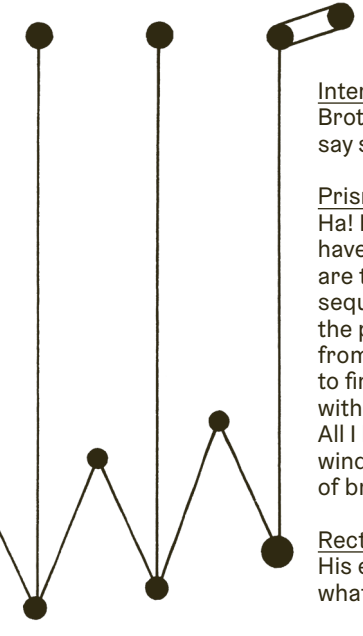
Circula rouses senses a presence. She ascends to a third plane towards the Palace, accompanied by the two dancers.

Circula
In the pergola of scented yearning I will wait for you, dear, come when you softly wake. When the petals

oppress you from your dreams. Come when the soft sigh of the trees whisper in silence. Ah! I wait for you here, ah!

Exit with two dancers.

Prism approaches the well.



Rectangula
Ask him and he will say he came for water. Will he fill his pitcher from flowers, or from nooks and corners? If he looks into the well, he will see no friend!

Intersecta
Brother, you must not say such naughty things.

Prism
Ha! Ha! Is not this the haven of beauty? Where are the kisses and the sequestered sighs? I, the philosopher, walked from my cabin, hoping to find them prostrate with averted thighs! All I hear is the silent wind. All I see is a tatter of broken leaves.

Rectangula
His eyes look in and what do they see? The inverse side of something that may be.

Prism starts swinging his staff above the heap of blossoms.

How long will these things live, torn from their mothers? They have hardly stooped to wither. Quite perishably, each thing is really torn away. However it may seem not to be.

Hooks his staff to a cluster.

Take that bit of color now. How long has it been born?

Parabola lifts his head through the flowers.

Why, my dear friend and neighbor, why it is not your custom to be buried in such things! Suppose now, oh, I am so sorry. Suppose I had struck them, thinking them empty of all life.

You would have been hurt, and I would be to blame.

Intersecta
Parabola would be hurt!

Rectangula
Prism would be to blame.

Prism
Oh! Oh! I just thought of it. I wouldn't want to hit a lady. She is not there, is she, as usual by your side? I might have killed you both What a pity!

Parabola
Ah, Prism, at last I have confirmation. Deft, trivial little things carry all the weight. For days, something from you has been trying to enter my moods. It didn't seem to be a willing thought. But the least shiver of the potter's tongue. While moulding a sentence, destined to be beautiful. That is what I meant. (What a pity!)

Intersecta
What a pity! ... etc.

Rectangula
What a pity! ... etc.

Prism
Now, now, Parabola, are you demented that you would think for an instant that I would cast an aspersion?

Parabola
Ah, thank you, Prism. That is the word I was searching for through the endless sealed passages of vocabulary. That is just what you did without knowing it, you cast an aspersion.

Prism
Fellow, neighbor, friend, what more nouns are there of distinction? How many more meagre testaments of apposition? Please. You unwittingly make me unwelcome. This is, somehow, a different day.

Let me draw my water and go home. In passing, let me say
I have never had an evil thought of you, Parabola.

Rectangula &
Intersecta
What a pity! ... etc. ... Ah! Ah!

Parabola
There was a rift – I have myself together now. One little accent knocked and unjointed me from myself! That's what friendship does. Now, Prism, tell me, now that I am strong, tell me the cause of your enmity to Circula!

Intersecta
Have a care, Parabola, you are touching exquisite perils!

Prism
Circula! Never let me live to touch such splendor. Stop your brain,

turn back your mood to where it was before. You two are the wonder of all of us. Run and get Circula. Let me see you entwined again.

Rectangula
Stop whittling at your doom and get Circula. He can't move, caught by his virgin unresolve.

Parabola
Yes. I will go and get her – but now there is this bigger craving. Now! Now disjoint her from me. Tell me what you think of her ... as a being ... You say you are my friend ... Tell me!

Prism
Ah! I like to speak upon such a theme. What do you think of Circula! What would you be, I've often hazarded, without that subtle bit or beauty? You, Parabola, who was something before you met her. Pluck her from you as a figure of thought. What would you be is always my imponderable imagining.

Parabola
No! Stop.

Prism
Now that you've moved me to speak, I'll give you what you've never dared to think. All the forms know what Circula is. You are so vexed with love, so twisted by an unconsidered passion, that no one can know you. Don't let this seem cruel, excepting as her lover. What other being are you, except hers?

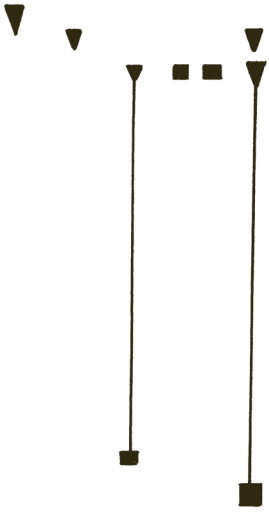
Rectangula
Fool. Beautiful and imperishable fool. Watch him.

Parabola
Now, let go your shafts of stupefying air. I am a form.

True, there is no mood here resembling a beard. My thirst is firm. I cannot swallow harder than I do. Have I grown fallible in these moons and suns of happiness? Were they only treacherous skeins that held me idolized? Have I not been undeceived by the semblance of love? I may not, can not, will not be the dawn of unwisdom.

Intersecta
Misconceived element in the infinite plan. Our throat is pain.





Prism
Poor Parabola, I didn't mean to hurt you. Remember, it was caused by your question. What was the cause of your question? What was the cause of its cause?

Rectangula
Remember the cause and the grandfather cause and the trillions of aboriginal causes.

Parabola
No, brave Prism if you hurt me, it is time for me to hurt. After so much pleasure, hurting is enjoyable. I am weak, but I am changed.
I am harder now, but not so happy. You have changed, too. Everything ... Some unearthly glamour has left the sky. I am heavy who used to seem so light and free. Ah! How swiftly things can happen in this universe of forms. What is, who is that slightly curving line almost perpendicular to a plane?

Prism
Why, that is noble Linea, the beautiful and blessed of geometry. I have always thought that she was fond or you. Excuse me, Parabola, I wanted to be gone before she came.

She looked at me this morning with such ashen eyes. Grant me a favor, Parabola. You stay here in your accustomed place – and let me leap there into the bower. I'll make my way out if I can and slip away. Or, I may remain ... It will be honorable, you knowing that I am there. I really cannot bear her look again. I'll try not to see through the leaves. I'll not intend to hear, if you wish to speak with her.

Exit.

Parabola
Why is it? I can almost know why everyone is so strange today. Where has Circula gone? Ah yes, I remember. She saw someone coming and went away. She was

singing there, a little while ago. My children are deeply conceal'd by the ledge. The Friend has gone above the leaves, opaque to all but his gleams. One change, I forget what it is, makes a blinding rush of unexpected things.

Linea enters slowly at last and looks at him curiously.

Linea
You weren't here when I came before. Where is she ... where is Circula? Has anything happened? ... Is Circula not here? Really, Dear, I ran all the way to the gate. I am like a bellows that is frightened, our atmosphere thin ... Is anything wrong? No one can remember when you two, so beautiful, were not here.

Parabola
Linea, of the ancient Euclid infinite line, reaching from the heavens through our plane – we have always followed you with our eyes, not knowing why we despaired. Ha! You notice some change here, do you? What, now, tell me, what change do you think it is? You know me, and I know you. We all know the tangible things ... And you know Circula ... What have you thought against Circula?



Intersecta
Who has thought ...

Rectangula
What have you thought ... anyone thought of Circula?

Int. and Rec. leap, run, hide and emerge.

Linea
Parabola, dear, I don't understand ... I think nothing against Circula.

Parabola
Nothing?

Rectangula
Nothing?

Intersecta
Nothing?

Linea
Nothing more than any woman thinks about another.

Parabola
What is that?

Linea
Her eyes are queer

Parabola
Eyes ...

Intersecta
... eyes are queer

Rectangula
eyes ...

Linea
One of her eyes is like a morning of half sun. The other like a rainy afternoon.

Parabola
I praise her eyes.

Linea
She loves you too freely; a normal mother loves her children.

Intersecta
Children, children?

Rectangula
She has no children, just that one grown child.

Linea
What makes me speak like this to you?

Parabola
Rush on with words. Say everything that has ever wanted saying.

Linea
We – everyone feels that she rests too much in your arms. She should stand more straight, leaning upon you less.

Parabola
Ah! How you all hurt me today. This must be the truth, it cuts and stings so much. Everything I thought, then, was mistaken!

Enter Geodesa.

How could I have been so barelessly happy? Who is that? More people coming to my well for water?

Geodesa
What are these particles floating in the cream of my vision? Oh, I am sorry. You begin to take shape and recognition. Where is the love-sick female, quaking Parabola, who usually has her prehensile thighs crossed about your torso?

Linea
Don't mind him, Parabola.

Intersecta
Why don't you go away, if you came to harry our father?

Parabola
No, children, Linea. He serves an unexpected theme, by coming here. Geodesa, what do you think of Circula?

Rectangula &
Intersecta
Let us help him with the water.

Linea
Go home before you destroy something.

Geodesa
Never did I think I'd have a call to speak to you about Circula. The lazy love-sick queen!

Intersecta & Rectangula & Linea
Ah!

Geodesa
Lolling in perpetual mooning!

Intersecta & Rectangula & Linea
Ah!

Geodesa
Cross-eyed and much too slim!

Intersecta & Rectangula & Linea
Ah! Ah! Ah!

Geodesa
Haughty and repelling! Bah! Your carrying on has been indefensible, poignantly oppresive to the modern mind! Was that what you wanted me to say?

Parabola
Yes, dear Geodesa, that was all we needed. He started the terror, where is he? Oh, Prism! He wounded the poor fool.

Prism emerges slyly from his plane.

Prism
I'd have sworn I heard someone call me. Ha! This confession may amuse you. Flowers are soporific, aren't they? I fell sound asleep.

Parabola
Indifference hurts me more that all your sharp pangs. Very well. You brought the avalanche whirling down. It caught me, broke me into powder. Ah.

He reels, Linea, Int. and Rec. leap to support him.

Wrong ev'ry brilliant thought of each perfect day. I went too far with beauty ...

Prism
First, all this pain could have been prevented. Second, it probably will do you good.

Geodesa
This collapse had a cause that should have been foreseen by you.

Prism
Nothing like this has ever happened to us because we are philosophical.

Geodesa
We feel out each timber before we walk on it.

Prism
The spectacle of a man, suffering from an error. That's what you are. What a fool you were to fall in love.

Geodesa
He asked us and we told him the truth.

In all these years. We've never spoken once.

Prism
It's taken form-control of the highest kind.

Geodesa
We wanted to save him more than once, if that were possible.

Prism
We've been so patient and so kind ...

Intersecta
Stop! Lacerating tongues. We've had want and hardship, but you, today, have taught us how to hate.

Rectangula
Get home, you mongers or I'll fall through space with you, clawing your accursed eyes out.

Linea
Dash at them. Break their brittle, poisonous bodies.

Parabola
Stop, children, Linea. You all have shown me the state of love on our plane. I want to show you how blind you are. Look down – look down – look there on the ground by the well and tell me what you see. Oh, how happy I was to trust a satisfying passion.

He picks up a huge, jagged, ragged object of felonious size and endowed with spikes. He raises it, holding it like an adder or hyena.

Do you not see this perceptible toad, slimy and impersonal as a whale?

Geodesa
What is it? I never with my eyes saw such a thing.

Prism
It's an honest looking thing, isn't it?

All fall to examining and staring at it.

There's no white spot on it anywhere.

Geodesa
I rather like the thing. What is it?

Linea
It's blood will shrivel your hands.

Intersecta
Papa! It's horrible! Throw it away!

Rectangula
Quick. Drop it there by the well.

Geodesa
Is it a dead star, or a vermillion liver? Never has there been such a malapod.

Parabola
I don't know what it is. It was no bigger than a leaf when I saw it first. My, the black thing has

grown hard and heary.
Take it!

Prism
No, keep it! It's yours.
Tell us what it is!



Geodesa
Yes, tell us!

Prism
Tell us!

Prism & Geodesa
Tell us!

Circula appears on the third plane.

Circula
Parabola, I wait here for you among the flowers. I adore you, oh, come to me across the warm earth while the light is tender. We are so near. Bring me your love?

She passes into the wings.

Parabola
Oh happiness serene, you have destroyed by this fearful thing.

The orange light of the sun becomes blue. Parabola seems about to throw the projectile. Prism and Geodesa assist him. It whizzes through the intervening medium, strikes in the wings. She has been struck, rushes again upon her plane and collapses. Int. and Rec. mount swiftly to her plane and bend over her. The light becomes ominous and fearful.

Circula
Ah! Ah!

Intersecta
We are orphans again.
We have no mother.
We have no mother.

Rectangula
Even I in the presence or such ugliness feel a mood resembling pity. My eyes seem unnaturally wet.

Parabola
They suffer their change well. I was worried about the children.

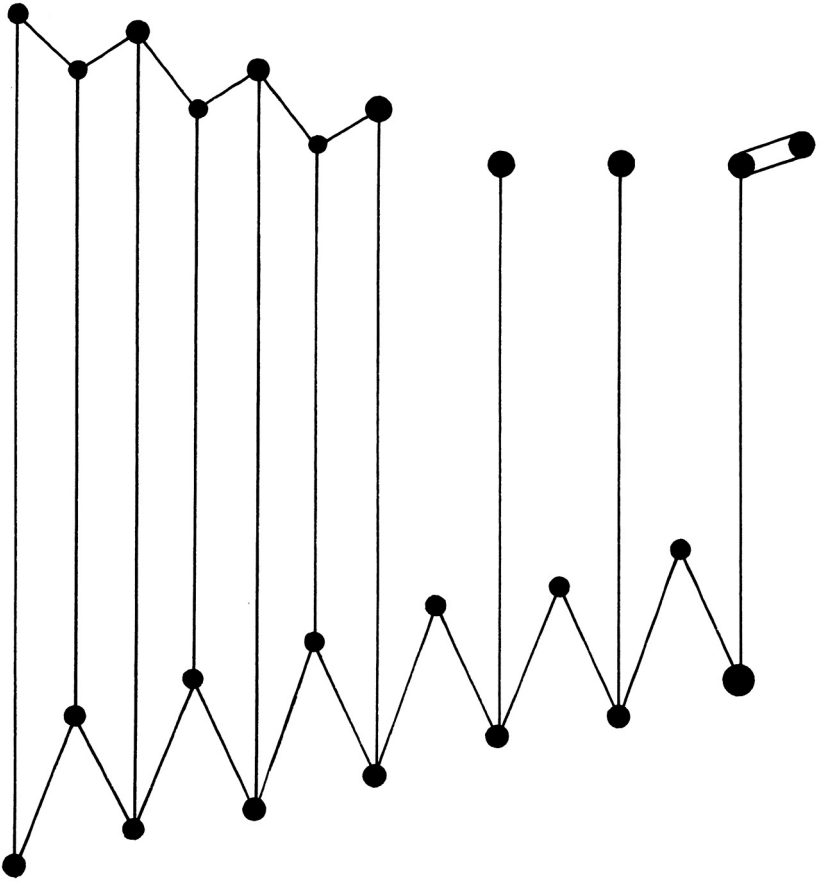
Intersecta

Weeping.

Ah – ah – ah.

Curtain.

Cannes/Salzburg
August–November 1929



Entstehung
August bis November 1929

Uraufführung
21. September 2025 in Berlin in Kooperation mit dem Musikfest Berlin

Mitwirkende

Dirigent
Karl-Heinz Steffens

Orchester
Norrköping Symphony Orchestra

*Solist*innen*
Aleksander Nohr (Parabola), Mari Eriksmoen (Circula), Matthew Newlin (Rectangula), Hanna Husáhr (Intersecta), Linard Vrielink (Prism), Henning von Schulman (Geodesa), Hongni Wu (Linea)

Komponist
Marc Blitzstein (1905–1964)

Libretto
George Whitsett

Tonmeister
Thore Brinkmann

Produzent
Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung

Label
Capriccio Rec.

Toningenieur
Håkan Ekman

Aufnahmen am 23. und 24.9.2025 Schweden, Norrköping, De Geerhallen

Impressum

Bauhaus Music Vol. 1
Marc Blitzstein
Parabola and Circula

Künstlerische Leitung
Michal Friedländer
Karl-Heinz Steffens
Dr. Kai Hinrich Müller

Bauhaus-Archiv /
Museum für Gestaltung

Direktorin
Prof. Dr. Brigitte Franzen

Kaufmännischer Direktor
Alexander Stockinger

Bauhaus-Archiv e. V., Vorstandvorsitzender
Dr. Markus Klimmer

Projektleitung
Alma Sophie Seiberth

Kommunikation
Ulrike Andres
Christiane Caldari-Winkler
Gloria Fock

Dank an das gesamte Team des Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung für die Unterstützung!

Bauhaus-Archiv /
Museum für Gestaltung
Knesebeckstr. 1
10623 Berlin
T +49 30 2540020
bauhaus@bauhaus.de
www.bauhaus.de

bauhaus
archiv
museum

Lektorat
Henrike Doerr

Übersetzung
Robert Brambeer

Bildnachweis
Heinrich Siegfried Bormann, „analyse eines tonstückes.“, 1930, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, adaptiert für das Artwork durch Neue Gestaltung

Visuelle Konzeption
Neue Gestaltung, Berlin

Veröffentlichung mit Erlaubnis der Kurt Weill Foundation

Kat.nummer
C5564

Labelcode
LC08748

Das Aufführungsmaterial ist beim Musikverlag Boosey & Hawkes erhältlich.

Parabola and Circula
© The Blitzstein Music Company and Heirs of George Whitsett

© 2025 Bauhaus-Archiv e. V.
www.bauhaus.de

© + ℗ 2026 Capriccio, A–1040 Wien
www.capriccio.at

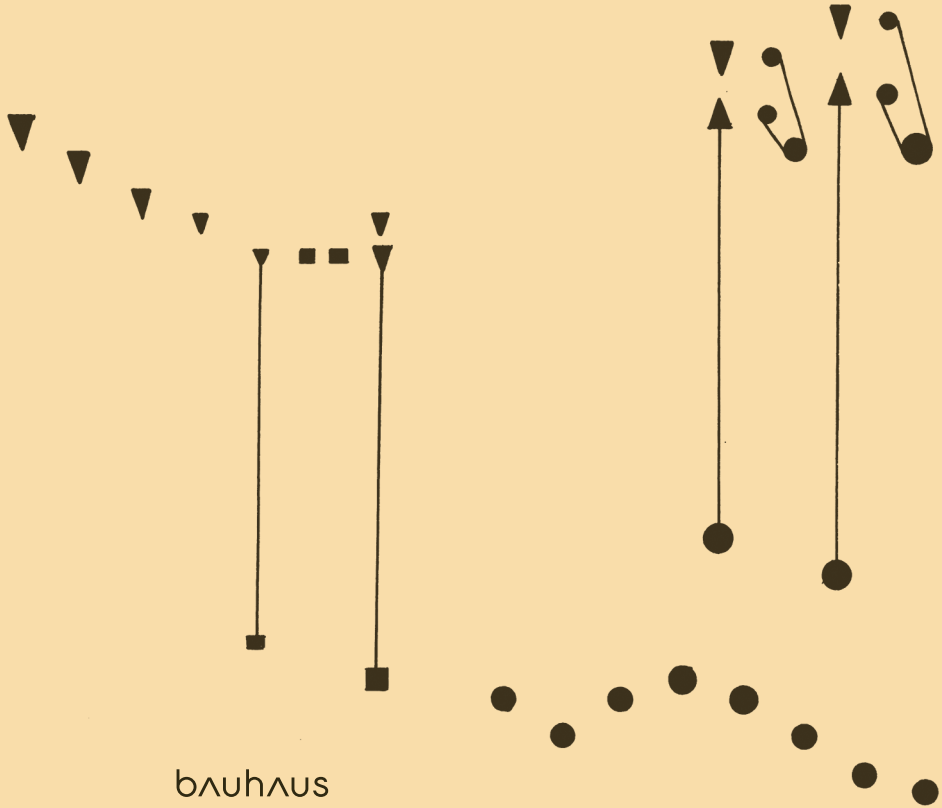
Kontakt
Naxos Deutschland Musik & Video Vertriebs-GmbH
Gruber Str. 46 b,
DE–85586 Poing
info@naxos.de

Gefördert durch

LOTTO STIFTUNG BERLIN

BERLIN
Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt

Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien


bauhaus
music