

opment is as forced as Gallagher's performance - *Spring Awakening's* second act is theatrically captivating, while the music, lyrics, and text all generate from a joint impulse. After Melchior is expelled from school and blamed as the scapegoat for Moritz's death, the electric guitar led rock and roll number "Totally Fucked" causes the adolescent ensemble to turn the stage upside down - it's as if it were their very playground - with a defiant blast of amplified song, jagged physical movements, and repeated shouts of "You're Fucked!" The square platform stage within the stage, which has been designated the prime acting area from the outset, functions as a zone of youthful rebellion as desks are artfully turned over and used as objects woven into

Peter Zazzali takes another crack at *Spring Awakening* through the long-form essay later in this volume.

the choreography. The number ends triumphantly, before revealing the banished hero, Melchior, defiantly sitting at a ubiquitous desk chair that has been

perpendicularly fastened to the theatre's back wall, some twelve feet off the ground. The rigid social construction of the stage world has been thrown into momentary chaos, and alas, the audience can cheer, shout, and ultimately lament with its brave young representatives.

In spite of the fact it reduces Wedekind's text to a loosely connected series of scenes predominantly expressed musically, Sater and Sheik's rendition proves to be an exciting theatrical event, if not a nuanced one. While its modern motifs most often work to define the play's central tension (the generational struggle), subtleties of character and their corresponding

situations are insufficiently explored. During the course of the story we encounter two teenage deaths, an expulsion from school, parents disowning their children, an unwanted pregnancy, and the sexual awakening of numerous teenagers - both gay and straight ones. However, nearly all these events are dealt with superficially. Perhaps it is expecting too much to criticize a pop songwriter as gifted as Duncan Sheik and a librettist as crafty as Steven Sater for failing to fully express the complexity of Wedekind's original text. Nonetheless, their version of a play that has been consistently regarded as exciting, shocking, and controversial most certainly captures the former sentiment, which is more than can be said for most Broadway offerings.

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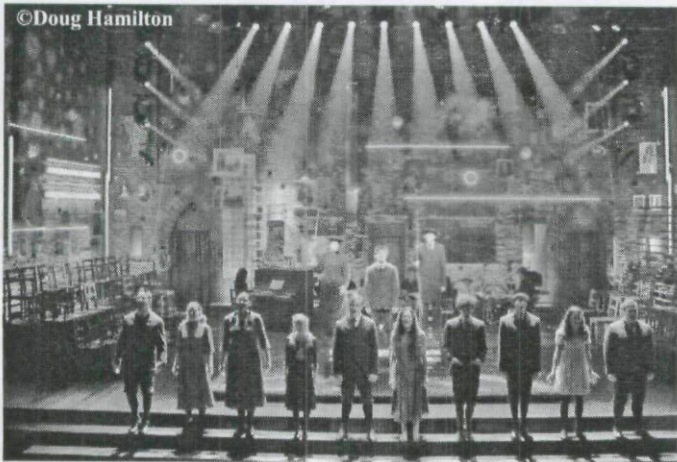
Written in 1891, Frank Wedekind's world of *Spring Awakening* is first and foremost about youth and their world: the strict governance of their parents, the various politics and restrictions of their school, and the redundant sermons of their pastor echoing and affirming the other institutions. Combined these elements create an oppressive world and a dysfunctional system with distant parents being violent and incapable of communicating to their children, school authorities functioning as mechanized and militant autocrats, and a church and its pastor enabling and legitimizing both method and ideology. In short, the world of Wedekind's young characters is depicted as a realm run by a dominant voice, constantly playing with their fears and dictating a constant rebuke of their discovery of a sexual

life.

With this as the basic gestus of the play, Wedekind's 19th century play on Broadway may at first cause skepticism

of panning to the audiences' preconditioned and expectant minds, Michael Mayer chose to clearly focus on and (re)present (i.e. "make present again")

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Wedekind's 19th century world and imagination. In his staging, for example, Mayers chose a theatrically honest staging rarely seen in the American Theater: when time came for the actors to sing, they very naturally and in a Brechtian manner, would pull out a mi-

crophone from their side pocket, sing the song, put it back in their pocket and move on. Neither Mayer, nor the actors, nor the audience were at any point concerned with the appearance of sound equipment in the scene, ultimately signaling: "It is, after all, theatre that we are doing."

and disbelief: "What does Wedekind have to do with Broadway?" one may ask, but such questions and skepticism are answered within the first minutes of the production. Sater's lyrics capture the situation and spirit of the scenes, while Sheik's music supplies an ample range of music and atmosphere, ranging from violent and angry, to soft and tender, to sad and melancholic. While the music throughout remains contemporary, the production visuals are a cross between the 19th and the 21st centuries; whereas Susan Hilferty's costume design evokes the 19th century, Christine Jones' set design and Kevin Adam's lighting design (neon lights on the brick walls and color light bulbs hanging from the ceiling) represents a 21st sensibility.

In the spirit of the production's modernization and contemporary choices, Christina Jones used the multiple settings of the play - classroom, different homes with different parents, church, graveyard, meadows - to design the space as a single unit with different parts and functions. The set design started before the start of the play, where some audience members were seated on rows of chairs on the stage, next to the band and the carefully arranged artwork on the brick walls. All other audience members could watch and see how the space transformed itself into a classroom. In collaboration with lighting designer Kevin Adams,

Beyond the carefully conceived contemporarization, a second point which made the production successful was that it avoided the traps caused by gimmickry and sensationalization. Instead



Sketches for Set Design @ Christine Jones

Jones utilized neon lights on the walls of the stage as well as the theatre, thereby extending the classroom space into the theatre space, at once embracing and inviting the audience to be part of the reality of the play. With this spatial and set configuration, the center stage held a multi-layered platform which, depending on the scene, was used either plainly or with minimal furniture, e.g. a table and a chair, a single chair, or two rows of chairs as in a classroom.

While the center stage with its center platform constituted the main part of the play's action - the classroom - to accentuate the classroom's central presence and activity, both sides of the stage were blocked off with bleachers and chairs. Created as part of the set, as well as audience seating, the bleachers held both audience members as well as the moving, running, singing and dancing cast members. In addition, two upstage doors for entrances and exits, and a central door for the surprise moments, were created. Using the construed and limited parameter marked by the platform, the 19th century desk-chairs and the two audience-filled bleachers, Jones quite remarkably and logically created

Wedekind's classroom space. To add interior details, various paintings and frames were hung on the back and adjacent brick walls, including a large painting of a white horse with writing across it, a painting

of a white rose, several portraits and, to complete the classroom reality, a blackboard with chalk writing, and crossed-out words hung on the stage-left back wall.

With such a controlled physical space mirroring the tight and suffocating psychological space and reality of the children, the central platform was used in a theatrical and unexpected manner for the scene in which Wendla and Melchior come together and make love to one another. Attached to four ropes on the four corners, the platform was hoisted up, while the two young lovers kissed one another and made love. With the platform hung in mid-air, the other students gathered around the platform, holding it by its edges and gently pushing it to and fro, almost as in support of the action. The result of this lovemaking scene was that Wendla becomes pregnant, and forced by her parents' intervention, undergoes a clandestine abortion.

Wendela's tragic death is not the only one in the play. Under pressure and fear of being a failure, Moritz commits suicide. After Moritz commits suicide, his

father appears onstage, carrying with him a bunch of flowers. Looking into the grave (created by the stage trapdoor) he breaks down, falls and cries, after which he leaves, leaving behind the flowers on the ground. The other classmates replace his position on stage, one at a time, each picking up a single stem of a flower and dropping it into Moritz's grave and rushing off stage.

A rare production, where tragedy, comedy, material for reflection or entertainment come together, the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening* had it all. Combined with the music, the energetic and committed acting of the cast, directing, the set, costume and light design, the production was a great success in bringing Wedekind to a contemporary audience.

BABAK EBRAHIMIAN

LULU. FRANK WEDEKIND. TRANSLATION: CARL MUELLER. DIRECTED & ADAPTED: MARK LAMOS. YALE REPERTORY THEATRE. NEW HAVEN, CT / USA. 6 APRIL 2007

Perhaps no work of Frank Wedekind's is more shocking than his *Lulu* story, which is comprised from a pair of play-texts: *Earth Spirit* (1895) formerly known as *A Monster Tragedy*, and *Pandora's Box* (1903). A chilling narrative that centers around a siren whose sexuality lures various men (and a single woman) to a tragic demise, Wedekind's *Lulu* unabashedly appeals to our most carnal desires and guttural impulses. Similar to his earlier play, *Spring Awakening*, *Lulu* uses a pastiche of dramaturgical styles that range from the expressionistic, to the realistic, to the grotesque. Moreover, also like *Spring Awakening*, the sexual openness of *Lulu's* characters can be read as an affront to the cultural mores of the late nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie. However, this is where the similarities between Wedekind's two best-known works end. *Lulu's* level of controversy and iconoclasm goes beyond that of *Spring Awakening's*; indeed, it was the target of censorship and nearly landed Wedekind in prison. While providing scintillating scenes of sexual desire, which are graphically rendered onstage, and oftentimes in large numbers of people, *Lulu* also possesses moments of utter violence, grotesqueness, and imagination. Although this rich work is rarely produced nowadays, The Yale Repertory Theatre produced a resourceful, if not entirely effective, version of the play in New Haven, CT.

In the production's opening moments *Lulu's* male victims are seated facing the audience down center in various stages of undress, as the Animal Trainer, played by the creepily capable Michael Braun, regales us while the "beautiful and diabolical" *Lulu*, bedecked in the costume of the Commedia Dell'Arte figure Pierrot, stands and rocks atop a swing. This sultry sight / site serves as a telling prologue to the narrative's recurring theme: *Lulu's* mesmerizing and fatal command over the men, boys, and

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