

## 15 | Exoticism, Race, and the Broadway Musical in the ‘City of Waltzes’

Marcel Prawy’s 1968 *West Side Story* Production  
at the Vienna Volksoper

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On 28 February 1968, a production of *West Side Story* opened at the Vienna Volksoper, the second most important opera theatre in the Austrian capital after the Vienna State Opera. One of the main reasons for the Volksoper’s decision to stage *West Side Story* was that Leonard Bernstein was working in Vienna with increasing frequency. Bernstein made his debut at the Vienna State Opera in 1966 with Verdi’s *Falstaff*, and he returned in 1968 for a production of Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*. Already in 1956, moreover, the Vienna Volksoper produced Bernstein’s musical *Wonderful Town*. The Volksoper’s *West Side Story* was in fact promoted as an early celebration of Bernstein’s fiftieth birthday. The staging of Bernstein’s work contributed to the rise of the Austrian metropolis as a European centre of American musical theatre. As this chapter shows, the main link between Bernstein, Broadway, and Vienna was Marcel Prawy (1911–2003), a well-known Austrian dramaturg, opera connoisseur, and critic. Prawy was also one of the first European producers of American musicals. In his 1996 memoir, Prawy claimed that in his pioneering productions of American musicals on European stages, he aimed to enlarge the operatic repertoire:

I assumed from this (and you must know that I am describing a world that was quite different from the present one) that they [musicals] were an interesting enrichment of the operatic repertoire. Musicals belong to the opera, with a style that is appropriate for opera, sung with great voices, played by large orchestras, i.e., an inebriation with music. We viewed this artform (in contrast to unsuccessful modern operas) as a success formula for modern opera . . .<sup>1</sup>

This approach is also apparent in Prawy’s adaptation of *West Side Story*, which imputes Central European cultural viewpoints and preferences into the American artform, particularly in its representation of ethnic conflicts.

Marcel Prawy was born in 1911 as Marcell Ritter Frydman von Prawy into a prominent Viennese Jewish family. During his studies of law at the

University of Vienna, he also attended Egon Wellesz's musicological lectures and became an opera enthusiast. After finishing his law degree in 1936, Prawy became an assistant to the Italian pro-Fascist film director and screenwriter Carmine Gallone. During the work on Gallone's 1936 film *Opernring* (English title: *Thank You, Madame*) in Vienna, Prawy became acquainted with Polish opera singer and film star Jan Kiepura, and soon became the secretary to Kiepura and his wife, Hungarian actress and soprano Marta Eggerth. Thanks to Kiepura and Eggerth, Prawy was able to emigrate to the United States after the Anschluss of Austria in 1938. His employers soon became involved with Broadway, most prominently in the 1943 production of Lehár's *The Merry Widow* at the Majestic Theater, and Prawy got to meet leading personalities of the American musical theatre, such as Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Jerome Kern. Prawy was fascinated by the differences between European opera and American musicals:

I discovered this completely new world, which was still in its infancy, and made an indescribable impression on me: the living authors, who could be reached on the telephone, who stopped for tea in the afternoon instead of being buried at Vienna's Central Cemetery. Also greatly impressive was the unsubsidised theatre, which does not receive a single penny from the state, where people either go bankrupt or become millionaires. Where something could run for months – which was quite long in that time – or several years, and everyone became rich, or, if the critiques were bad, the theatre would be closed by the next morning and people could no longer afford to buy breakfast.<sup>2</sup>

Prawy eventually obtained American citizenship and enlisted in the US army, but returned to Vienna after the end of World War II. Back in Austria, he made use of his knowledge of American musical theatre when he organized a series of theatrical evenings in Vienna's Kosmos-Kino (later also 'cosmos theatre'), where he introduced and explained excerpts from American musicals to Austrian audiences. In 1955, Prawy became the chief dramaturg at the Vienna Volksoper (under the director Ernst Marboe) and in that position, he introduced American shows to a musical public until then solely devoted to operas and operettas. Prawy himself claimed that his were the first productions of musicals on the European continent.<sup>3</sup> Yet, already in 1948, Czech actors Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, who, similar to Prawy, spent World War II in the USA, introduced Prague audiences to *Finian's Rainbow*, though with a radically revised plot.<sup>4</sup> Prawy's first American import was Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate!*, which was enormously successful after its Volksoper premiere on

14 February 1956. The next American musicals at the Volksoper were Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* in 1956 and *Annie Get Your Gun!* in 1957, which nevertheless did not achieve the same success as *Kiss Me, Kate!* Due to the misfortunes of the two shows, the protests against introducing musicals in the 'city of operettas and waltzes,' and also the death of Prawy's supporter and the Volksoper director Marboe, the Volksoper returned to American works only in the mid 1960s. First, in 1965, Prawy produced *Porgy and Bess*, followed by *West Side Story* in 1968. Prawy's final two musical productions at the Volksoper were *Show Boat* in 1971 and *Carousel* in 1972. His musical-related activities ended in 1972, when he was hired by the Vienna State Opera to work on programming and public outreach and education.

Prawy became an admirer of Leonard Bernstein's music at a time when Bernstein was mostly unknown as a composer in Europe. Prawy and Bernstein first became acquainted when Prawy was preparing the 1956 production of *Wonderful Town*, which was the first Bernstein stage work to be performed in Europe. In 1957, Prawy attended the Broadway premiere of *West Side Story*. According to his biographer Otto Schwarz, Prawy wanted to bring *West Side Story* to Vienna soon after the American premiere but had lost his influence in Volksoper after the death of director Marboe in 1957.<sup>5</sup> Prawy continued to keep in touch with Bernstein, and in 1965, he approached Bernstein with the offer to conduct the Volksoper production of *Porgy and Bess*. At that time, however, Bernstein was already engaged to conduct Lucchino Visconti's production of Verdi's *Falstaff* at the Vienna State Opera. Prawy's interest in *West Side Story* was reignited in February 1964, when the Finnish troupe from the Tampere Theatre gave four guest performances of a 1963 Finnish adaptation of Bernstein's musical at the Theater an der Wien.<sup>6</sup> Prawy thought *West Side Story* was 'the masterwork of masterworks' ('Meisterwerk aller Meisterwerke') and eventually approached Bernstein about producing the work in Vienna.<sup>7</sup> Bernstein's only condition supposedly was that 'Tony and Maria . . . must sing like Rudolfo [sic] and Mimi in "La Bohème!"'<sup>8</sup> Prawy also claims that he decided to produce *West Side Story* at the Volksoper in 1968 to celebrate Bernstein's fiftieth birthday.<sup>9</sup> For that year, Bernstein was also engaged by the Vienna State Opera to conduct a new production of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, so he was to be in Austria and experience the performances of his own musical.

In preparing the Volksoper *West Side Story*, Prawy returned to his practice, applied already in *Kiss Me, Kate!*, *Wonderful Town*, and the Kosmos-Kino shows, of translating works of American musical theatre

into German. Prawy must have started the *West Side Story* translation already in the summer of 1966, because he claims he was working on it during his summer stay on the Canary Islands.<sup>10</sup> Once finished, Prawy's German translation pleased Bernstein, who supposedly told Prawy that *West Side Story* was better in German than in English.<sup>11</sup> Prawy's claim contrasts with many contemporaneous critiques that suggested that the German version was not as harsh-sounding as the English version, which made the work seem more sentimental.<sup>12</sup> As with most foreign-language adaptations of stage works, Prawy's *West Side Story* differed in significant details from the original text by Arthur Laurents and Stephen Sondheim. In Prawy's own estimate, the adaptation's lyrics kept only about 40 percent of the original meaning because, according to Prawy, Americans think and speak too quickly and the American language is therefore untranslatable.<sup>13</sup> The differences between Prawy's German adaptation and the English original also suggest that Prawy was concerned about making the American work more understandable for Viennese audiences not only through his approach to language and the poetic properties of the lyrics, but also by subtle but significant changes in the work's meaning. Most prominently, Prawy aimed at increasing the Broadway work's exoticist elements.

As earlier critics and researchers have pointed out, both the original 1957 musical and the 1961 film combine negative stereotypes with sympathetic agency in how they depict *West Side Story*'s two ethnic groups, the American-born characters, represented by the Jets, Doc, and the policemen, and the Puerto Rican characters, represented by the Sharks and their girls. Ralph Locke explains, for example, that *West Side Story* has many hallmarks of earlier exoticist operas and operettas: the exotic group, the Puerto Ricans, are presented as the Other and are effeminized, the Polish-American Tony is portrayed as 'the courageous yet sensitive Self,' and, similar to many earlier Western or proto-Western opera heroes, is depicted as he 'intrudes, at some peril, into a forbidden, darker-skinned region, which is represented by the tender and beautiful Maria, the exotic Other, the Desired One.'<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Locke continues, few earlier exotic works 'focus as unremittingly on the search for a place of reconciliation as *West Side Story* does . . . the death of exoticism – the show finally suggests – may permit the birth of a multiracial, multiethnic, mutually tolerant society.'<sup>15</sup> In discussing the 'Dance at the Gym,' Locke also suggests that there is something specifically American about *West Side Story*'s mixture of exoticist and de-exoticizing elements: the fact that both ethnic groups participate and delight in the Mambo, a Latin dance, and the fact that

through the enjoyment of the music the audience is ‘drawn into caring’ about the on-stage characters, parallel the processes in which white America often resents ‘the intrusion of darker-skinned populations into its protected domains, but, on the cultural level, it absorbs elements of the Outsider, quickly domesticates and masters them.’<sup>16</sup> Bernstein’s Puerto Ricans, in other words, are both a source of alienation and absorption; they are presented in a way that not only stresses ethnic differences but also makes the mainstream white audience sympathize with them.

A significant aspect of Prawy’s attempt to translate the Broadway show for Central European audiences is that the Viennese adaptation to some extent abandons *West Side Story*’s original ambiguity of representing the Other. To clearly bring out the ethnic differences in his German-language adaptation, Prawy decided to cast the American-born characters with native German speakers and the Puerto Rican characters with non-German performers, hired outside of German-speaking lands after hundreds of auditions in New York and Madrid. To be sure, the original Broadway production of *West Side Story* also aimed at an ethnic authenticity by casting some of the Puerto Ricans with Latin-American actors – this was the case especially with Chita Rivera in the role of Anita, who had Puerto Rican ancestry. At the same time, other performers in the Puerto Rican roles on Broadway were of European descent – this was the case with the original Maria, Carol Lawrence. Prawy’s approach to casting and how it was perceived in the contemporary press, however, leaned even more toward racial stereotyping. Most of the reviews of the 1968 production hail Prawy’s distinction between the two ethnic groups as the most remarkable achievement, which makes it seem as if the general perception of the musical in 1968 centered on how it depicted ethnic difference, not common humanity. The ethnicity of the Volksoper cast and particularly of the Puerto Rican impersonators became a source of immense fascination for Austrian and German critics and called forth animalistic and sexual imagery. These critics, moreover, tended to further exoticize the American performers, sometimes referring to all of them as ‘coloured’ (‘farbig’).<sup>17</sup> Particularly fascinating and exotic to many critics was the Italian-American Carmine Terra in the role of Bernardo. The Viennese journal *Wochenpresse* described him as ‘interestingly exotic’ (‘interessant-exotisch’), and the reviewer for the journal *Wiener Zeitung* referred to him as ‘a nimble, ready-to-jump beast of prey’ (‘feinnerviges, sprungbereites Raubtier’).<sup>18</sup> The critics found Arline Woods, the Volksoper Anita, similarly fascinating and exotic; *Der Merker* called her ‘a sexually charged temperament bomb’ (‘sexladene Temperamentsbombe’).<sup>19</sup> The critic for the Swiss journal *Tages-Anzeiger* likewise rates the racial aspect of

the Volksoper production as significant when he writes that he was initially skeptical about the show, expecting a musical turned into an operetta ('ein Musical à la viennoise') and wondering whether the songs were already too well known and outdated, especially because of the popularity of the film and the recordings of the English version. But the German production was eventually a pleasant surprise for the critic, particularly because the racial difference was brought out so effectively through the actors' accents.<sup>20</sup>

Prawy's German translation contributes in several details to the sharper ethnic differentiation of the two groups portrayed in the musical. For the most part, Prawy's text is sensitive to both the poetic meanings and the rhymes and rhythms of Stephen Sondheim's original lyrics. This can be seen already in the very first stanza of the opening 'Jet Song':

| <u>Stephen Sondheim's lyrics</u>                     | <u>Marcel Prawy's translation</u>                      | <u>English translation of Prawy's translation</u>      |
|--|--|--|
| When you're a Jet,<br>You're a Jet all the way       | Ein echter Jet<br>Ist es vom Kinderbett                | A true Jet<br>Remains a Jet from his<br>child's bed    |
| From your first cigarette<br>To your last dyin' day. | Bis zum letzten Gebet,<br>Denn ein Jet bleibt ein Jet. | To the last prayer,<br>Since a Jet stays always a Jet. |

To create a close rhythmic connection between the original text and the German translation, Prawy often departs from the original meaning. These phrases at times make the Jets more outspoken about their racist attitudes. In the opening of the first-act quintet 'Tonight' ('Heut Nacht'), for example, Prawy sharpens the phrases with which the Jets refer to the Sharks. Prawy changes the Jets' line 'The Puerto Ricans grumble "fair fight"' to 'Die Kokosfresser heulen: "Zweikampf"' ('The coconut eaters howl: "combat"') and the line 'We're gonna cut 'em down to size/Tonight' to 'Das Pack von Wilden wird heut klein – ganz klein' ('The pack of the wilds will be diminished today'). Another change that intensifies the Jets' racist views comes in Action's quatrain from 'Gee, Officer Krupke':

| <u>Stephen Sondheim's Lyrics</u>  | <u>Marcel Prawy's translation</u>   | <u>English translation of Prawy's translation</u>  |
|---|---|--|
| Dear kindly social<br>worker,<br>They say go earn<br>a buck.<br>Like be a soda jerker,<br>Which means like be<br>a schmuck. | Mein Fräulein<br>Jugendpfleger!<br>Bei Arbeit wird mir<br>schlecht.<br>Zum Schuft'n nimmt man<br>Neger,<br>Dafür sind sie grad recht. | Dear Miss social worker<br>I get sick at work.<br>For drudgery there are the<br>Negroes<br>That is something for them. |

The heightened racism of Prawy's portrayal of the Jets intensifies the differences between the white characters and the Puerto Ricans. It is easy to imagine that the sharpened representation of racial conflict in the Volksoper *West Side Story* may have resonated with the experiences of Prawy and other members of the Viennese Jewish community. In his memoir, for example, Prawy remembers with revulsion that the representation of the Black jazz band fiddler Jonny in the Vienna State Opera 1927 production of Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* caused week-long demonstrations with placards that reviled Blacks and Jews.<sup>21</sup> Gertrud Marboe, the wife of Ernst Marboe, the Volksoper director who helped Prawy produce *Kiss Me, Kate* in 1956, wrote, furthermore, that some members of the Viennese musical establishment opposed the introduction of musicals at the Volksoper with 'a certain anti-Semitism' ('einem gewissen Antisemitismus').<sup>22</sup> By making the Jets more explicitly racist, Prawy may have been making the Puerto Ricans more sympathetic to those who had experienced racial oppression, possibly because he himself, as a Jew in Vienna, may have to some extent identified with the Puerto Ricans.

The emphasis on ethnic difference in the Viennese adaptation is quite audible in the cast recording of the 1968 production, released by the CBS prior to the Volksoper premiere.<sup>23</sup> In the original Broadway recording from 1957, the Puerto Rican characters clearly deliver their songs with a Hispanic accent, but overall it is not difficult to recognize that most of them are native English speakers. In the Austrian recording, by contrast, not only do the performers have a foreign accent but they also put on a much more pronounced Hispanic accent, although many of them were not native Spanish speakers. These differences become particularly obvious in the most famous Puerto Rican number of *West Side Story*, the song 'America.' In the Broadway recording, Chita Rivera as Anita attempts to make the song's second stanza sound Hispanic but her American accent shines through. The Viennese Anita, Arline Woods, by contrast, sings in a more pronounced mixture of foreign accents, so that her phrases are nearly incomprehensible. In comparison to the Broadway Rosalia and Anita, furthermore, the Viennese performers sing in voices that are breathier, filled with more pronounced changes in timbre and vibrato, fluctuating tempo, and improvised sound effects.

A similar transformation occurs with the Viennese Maria. For the Volksoper production, Prawy hired Julia Migenes, a native New Yorker of Greek and Irish-Puerto Rican descent. As the *New York Times* noted in a 1981 interview, despite her appearance, Migenes spoke with a pronounced New York accent.<sup>24</sup> In the Viennese recording, Migenes nevertheless puts on a faux-Hispanic accent that was much stronger than that of Carol Lawrence,



the original Broadway Maria. This becomes quite obvious from the Broadway and Vienna recordings of 'I Feel Pretty.' Migenes's appearance and her vocal delivery of the role made a strong impression on the Viennese audiences and critics, most of whom perceived her as a Puerto Rican, not an American singer. Even after her Vienna debut in *West Side Story*, Migenes cultivated an exotic image for her European fans. In 1980, for example, she produced an LP entitled *Latin Lady*.<sup>25</sup> She also appeared in a number of exotic roles in Europe, including as Carmen in Francesco Rosi's 1984 film version of Bizet's opera, where she starred next to Plácido Domingo. In the years following her Viennese appearance in *West Side Story*, the Austrian press treated Migenes as a fascinating, exotic Other. In 1970, for example, the tabloid *Bunte Österreich Illustrierte* featured Migenes in a story titled 'Der Vorhang fällt, die Liebe bleibt' ('The Curtain Falls, the Love Remains'), which reports on her romantic relationship with Heinz Marecek, one of the Volksoper Jets.<sup>26</sup> The story concludes with an endearing, yet clearly exoticizing episode, in which Marecek nearly broke up with Migenes when he realized she had a quite significant weakness: she could not learn how to make Viennese Palatschinken, crêpe-like pancakes served with jam. To avoid destroying her relationship to the good-looking Austrian, the article adds, Migenes gave up pursuing Palatschinken recipes altogether. The myth of Migenes's exotic, Caribbean origin remained so strong in Austria that it is still presented as a fact in a 2012 PhD dissertation about Broadway musicals in Austria written at the University of Vienna, where Migenes is presented as born in Puerto Rico.<sup>27</sup>

Besides the vocal delivery, it is also once again Prawy's German translation that transforms Maria's image in the Volksoper production. Stephen Sondheim's original lyrics of 'I Feel Pretty' show Maria as joyfully playful yet also able to assess her emotions with a tongue-in-cheek attitude:

I feel pretty, oh so pretty  
 I feel pretty and witty and bright  
 And I pity any girl who isn't me tonight.

Prawy's translation is somewhat awkward and therefore presents a more simplistic and naïve image of Maria:

| <u>Marcel Prawy's translation</u>   | <u>English translation of Prawy's translation</u>  |
|---|--|
| Weil ich nett bin, einfach nett bin,<br>Und adrett bin, und süß und gescheit,<br>Tun mir Mädchen, die nicht ich sind,<br>heute sehr, sehr leid. | Because I am nice, simply nice,<br>And cute, and sweet and smart,<br>I pity the girls who are not me very<br>much today. |



Whereas Sondheim's Maria reflects on her emotions and to some extent makes fun of them as well, Prawy's Maria is simply describing her basic qualities. The Viennese Maria's ingenuousness is enhanced in the 1968 recording, where 'I Feel Pretty' proceeds in a slower tempo than in the original 1957 recording. As a result, the Viennese rendition of 'I Feel Pretty' becomes more sentimental and artless, similar to utterances from earlier Viennese operetta characters who were socially inferior, such as the introductory song 'Ich bin die Christel von der Post' ('I Am Christel, the Post Mistress') for the main non-noble heroine of Friedrich Zeller's 1857 classic *Der Vogelhändler* ('The Bird Seller'). Another famous operetta aria with which Viennese audience members may have associated the Austrian Maria's 'Weil ich nett bin' is Chinese Princess Mi's 'Im Salon zur blauen Pagode' ('In the Salon of the Blue Pagoda') from Lehár's 1929 *Das Land des Lächeln* ('The Land of Smiles'). At the same time, Mi's aria is in some ways more complex than Maria's because the easily exotic music (based on simple, repetitive, pentatonic tunes) clashes with her tongue-in-cheek lyrics that criticize the treatment of women in traditional Manchu society.

The exoticizing approach to Maria in the Volksoper *West Side Story*, was balanced by the Viennese approach to Tony. Whereas Maria became a more clearly exotic Other, Tony is easily identifiable as a Viennese hero. The particulars of the Viennese Tony are most closely related to the approach and skills of Tony's Volksoper impersonator, Adolf Dallapozza. Whereas Migenes got her first stage experiences on Broadway, Dallapozza was an Austrian-born operatic singer and a member of the Volksoper ensemble at the time of the *West Side Story* production. For the Volksoper audience, he was therefore a familiar figure, unlike Migenes, a newly arrived foreigner. In the 1968 recording, moreover, Dallapozza stands out because of the operatic quality of his voice and the Viennese accent with which he pronounces Prawy's German text. This is particularly obvious from a comparison of the 1957 and 1968 recordings of Tony's 'Something's Coming.' What in the 1957 recording sounds typically 'Broadway-like' transforms in the 1968 recording into an operetta cavatina, a style with which the Viennese audiences could easily identify. Bernstein himself picked up on Dallapozza's qualities of a good Austrian/European/white boy when he cast him as the simple-minded and good-natured Jaquino in his production of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, created with the Vienna State Opera team at the Theater an der Wien to celebrate Beethoven's bicentennial in 1970.

The intensity of ethnic characterization in the Volksoper *West Side Story* seems to have influenced many Austrian critics, who viewed racial conflict

as the defining issue of the work. For the critic of the Vienna journal *Neue Front*, Prawy's adaptation, although it was not in the original language, managed to present a genuine vision of how America, the American temperament and *joie de vivre*, are 'overshadowed by wildness, brutality, racial hatred, and unruly youth.'<sup>28</sup> The reviewer for the *Salzburger Volksblatt* was critical of the work's overall premise, because the story of Romeo and Juliet was overwhelmed, optically and acoustically, by racial questions and gang violence.<sup>29</sup> The reviewer also imagines many audience members objecting that what was depicted on the stage in the Volksoper *West Side Story* 'is not our world, not our idea of art' ('dies ist nicht unsere Welt, nicht unsere Vorstellung von Kunst'). The critic fears that the Austrian youth might try to imitate what they see on the stage. In other words, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* critique suggests that to some commentators the Volksoper production completely suppressed the humanistic elements of *West Side Story*; where Bernstein's work to some extent promotes multicultural understanding, some Volksoper audience members only saw racial violence and hate. The strong differentiation between the Jets and the Sharks in the Volksoper production might have also been the reason why Bernstein himself thought, as reported in several German reviews, that *West Side Story* was ideologically outdated by 1968. The *Zürcher Spiegel* critic, for example, explains why he perceived the Volksoper performance as too sentimental and at times dull.<sup>30</sup>

A possible reason might be that the interior political developments in America in the last three years have affirmed Bernstein's own worry that the fast transformation of racial problems in the US have already outpaced *West Side Story*, that the piece that was so intensely topical in 1957 no longer possesses any timeless value because the timeliness has vanished – nothing alters more rapidly than timely matters!

German critics were also quite opinionated about Bernstein's music and their criticism is also based on exoticist and racialized viewpoints. Bernstein's score became an object of exotic admiration mainly because it contains references both to North American and Latin American musical idioms. Most critics found particularly appealing those portions of Bernstein's score that were most unlike traditional European classical music, whereas they strongly objected to the lyrical, expressive, and most opera- and operetta-like selections. As the reviewer for the Graz journal *Südost-Tagepost* put it: the dance-like and rhythmic sections are very effective, but the lyrical ones are quite banal ('alles Tänzerisch-Rhythmische ist sehr wirksam, alles Lyrische eher banal').<sup>31</sup> The critic for

the journal *Wiener Montag* was more explicit about the exoticist bent of his musical preferences when he wrote that lyrical numbers such as 'Maria' are inexcusable, but Bernstein's music is redeemed by his reliance on 'Mittel-, Latein- und Color-Amerika [middle, Latin, and coloured America].'<sup>32</sup> Numerous reviewers went as far as to reject the lyrical numbers of *West Side Story* as 'kitschy.' The critic for *Der Merker*, for example, claimed that some numbers, such as 'Maria,' are so kitschy as to exceed the bearable level of Viennese operettas.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, the Volkoper *West Side Story* came to be viewed as reflecting specifically Viennese qualities, particularly by German critics outside of Austria. Especially interesting reactions come from reviewers in Switzerland, where the Volksoper toured with *West Side Story* in 1970. The *Zürcher Zeitung*, for example, pointed out that Dallapozza brought numerous 'Viennese moments' to the performance of Tony.<sup>34</sup> The *Zürcher Spiegel* was more critical, claiming that the Volksoper production included too many satirical slips into the manners of German-Austrian musical comedy, particularly in the 'cheap' 'Tonight' (Quintet) and in 'Gee, Officer Krupke.'<sup>35</sup> The critic also thought that Dallapozza's presentation in 'Maria' was unbearably 'schmaltzy.' Because they were viewed as a product of both Broadway and Austria, the Zurich performances of the Volkoper *West Side Story* added yet another layer of exoticism to the famous musical: it became a mixture of American musical theatre and Viennese operetta.

The Volksoper *West Side Story* shows that works of musical theatre do not necessarily reflect only the social, cultural, and political environment in which they were created, but that they continue to acquire new and significant meanings and associations through the processes of adaptation and cultural transfer. Marcel Prawy and his team not only created a landmark production that made *West Side Story* one of the most often performed works of American musical theatre in Europe but also left behind a fascinating record of how German-speaking Central Europeans of the mid twentieth century approached the complicated issues of racism and multi-culturalism.

## Notes

1. Marcel Prawy, *Marcel Prawy erzählt aus seinem Leben* (Vienna: Kremayr und Scheriau, 1996), 108. 'Ich bin davon ausgegangen (Sie müssen wissen, dass ich eine andere Welt beschreibe als die heutige), dass das eine interessante

Bereicherung des Opernrepertoires ist. Das Musical gehört in die Oper, mit einem operneigenen Stil, mit grossen Stimmen gesungen, von grossem Orchester gespielt, also ein Rausch von Musik. Wir haben darin (zum Unterschied von erfolglosen modernen Opern) ein Erfolgsschema einer modernen Oper gesehen . . .’

2. Prawy, 102. ‘Ich habe dort also diese vollkommen neue Welt, die in den Kinderschuhen steckte, kennengelernt, und sie hat unbeschreiblichen Eindruck auf mich gemacht: die lebenden Autoren, die man am Telefon anrufen konnte, die am Nachmittag zum Tee kamen und nicht auf dem Zentralfriedhof lagen. Ungeheuren Eindruck machte auch das nicht subventionierte Theater, wo der Staat keinen Heller gibt, wo die Leute entweder Pleite machen oder Millionäre werden. Wo etwas Monate – damals war das sehr lang – oder ein paar Jahre lief, und alle entweder reich wurden oder das Theater am nächsten Morgen schon gesperrt wurde und die Leute ihr Frühstück schon nicht mehr bezahlen konnten, wenn die Kritik schlecht war.’
3. Prawy, 107.
4. Conspicuously, Prawy admits in his memoirs that one of the works he considered as a potential first musical to be produced in Vienna was *Finian’s Rainbow*, which suggests that he may have been aware of the earlier Prague production. Prawy, 124.
5. Otto Schwarz, *Marcel Prawy ‘Ich habe die Ewigkeit noch erlebt’: Ein grosses Leben neu erzählt* (Vienna: Almathea, 2006), 171.
6. Schwarz, 172. The performance of the Finnish *West Side Story* in Vienna is discussed in Aino Kukkonen, *Heikki Värtsi: laidasta laitaan* (Helsinki: Like, 2011), 55–56. See this volume’s final chapter for more on this production of the show in Tampere, Finland, and in Vienna.
7. Prawy, 119.
8. Prawy, 119.
9. Prawy, 179.
10. Prawy, 71.
11. Prawy, 126.
12. This idea appears, for example, in Ruediger Engerth, ‘Keine Lerche in Manhattan: Glanzvolle Erstaufführung der *West Side Story* von Leonard Bernstein in der Wiener Volksoper,’ *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 1 March 1968, and Gerd Kriwanek, ‘Musical erobert Wien: Grosser Erfolg für die *West Side Story* in der Volksoper,’ *Volkszeitung Kaltenfurt*, 2 March 1968.
13. Prawy, 126.
14. Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 268–73.
15. Locke, 274–75.
16. Locke, 270–71.
17. Otto F. Beer, ‘Wird Wien eine Musical-Stadt? *West Side Story* folgt dem “Man von La Mancha,”’ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 March 1968.

18. Manfred Vogel, 'Volksoper: West-Side-Fest; Bernsteins *West Side Story*,' *Wochenpresse*, 6 March 1968 and Heinrich Neumayer, 'Virtuoses Musical-Theater: Wiederaufnahme von Bernsteins *West Side Story* in der Volksoper,' *Wiener Zeitung*, 12 January 1969.
19. I.M.S., 'West Side Story,' *Der Merker: Mitteilungsblatt des Vereines Opernfreunde* 13, no. 3 (March 1969): 10.
20. Walter Boesch, 'Romeo und Julia in Manhattan: Viermaliges Gastspiel der Volksoper Wien mit *West Side Story* im Zürcher Opernhaus,' *Tages-Anzeiger*, 4 May 1970. 'Den besten Einfall aber hatte Prawy in Bezug auf die Besetzung: da die Handlung bekanntlich auf den – auch rassistischen – Gegensätzen zwischen zwei Banden New-Yorker Halbstarker beruht, den weissen "Jets" und den puertorikanischen "Sharks" (Haie), die in diesem Musical nach Shakespeares "Romeo und Julia" stellvertretend für die Montagus und Capulets stehen, musste für eine nichtangelsächsische Version ein einigermaßen glaubhafter Kontrast geschaffen werden; das Problem wurde durchaus einleuchtend dadurch gelöst, dass man die Puertorikaner und ihre Mädchen von Ausländern, zumeist Amerikanern, auch solchen dunkler Hautfarbe, spielen liess, die Eingeborenen Manhattans hingegen von deutschsprachigen Bühnenleuten . . .'
21. Prawy, 48.
22. Prawy, 103.
23. On the recording, see Prawy, 121 and 184. Leonard Bernstein, *West Side Story*, Originalaufnahme der deutschsprachigen Bühnensfassung der Wiener Volksoper, nach einer Idee von Jerome Robbins, deutsches Buch und Gesangstexte Marcel Prawy, CBS S 70 040, 1968, LP.
24. John Rockwell, 'Julia Migenes-Johnson, from Ingenue to the Met,' *The New York Times*, 5 January 1981, p. 16.
25. Julia Migenes, *Latin Lady*, Ariola 31 879 0, 1980, LP.
26. *Bunte Österreich Illustrierte*, 31 March 1970.
27. Wilhelmine Brandtner, 'Dr. Marcel Prawy – Pionier und Wegbereiter des Musicals vom Broadway nach "Good Old Europe"' (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 2012), 153.
28. '-ring [sic],' 'Volksoper Wien: Prominententreffen in *West Side Story*,' *Neue Front*, 9 March 1968. 'Die *West Side Story* bleibt trotz des deutschen Wortes die unverfälschte Vision Amerikas, seines Temperaments, seiner Lebensfreude, überschattet von Wildheit, Brutalität, Rassenhass und einer ungezügigten Jugend.'
29. Walter Zeleny, 'West Side Story in der Volksoper,' *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 4 March 1968.
30. 'Gastspiel im Opernhaus: *West Side Story*,' *Zürcher Spiegel*, 5 May 1970. 'Eine gewisse Rolle mag dabei spielen, dass eben doch Bernsteins Befürchtung, "bei der raschen Veränderung der Rassenprobleme in den USA wäre das Werk bereits überholt", durch die innenpolitischen Entwicklungen der letzten drei

Jahre bestätigt wurde, dass überhaupt das 1957 hochaktuelle Stück nicht mehr überzeitliche Gültigkeit hat, weil es auf Aktualität abgestimmt wurde – nichts altert schneller als die aktuellen Dinge!’

31. Heinrich Neumayr, ‘Romeo und Julia in Manhattan: Leonard Bernsteins *West Side Story* in der Wiener Volksoper,’ *Südost-Tagepost*, 1 March 1968.
32. Franz Hrastnik, ‘Die “Kehr-Side” der *West Side Story*,’ *Wiener Montag*, 4 March 1968.
33. ‘I. M. S.,’ ‘*West Side Story*,’ *Der Merker* (March 1969): 9–10 (9).
34. ‘Romeo und Julia in den Slums von New York: Gastspiel der Wiener Volksoper mit “*West Side Story*” im Opernhaus,’ *Zürcher Zeitung*, 6 May 1970.
35. *Zürcher Spiegel*, 5 May 1970.