

*"To my Friends, Thilo, Ewald and Werner,*

*Congratulation and a few thoughts, the day after the Swing Street Premiere.*

*Speaking as a native New Yorker who for more than a decade of his youth haunted both the Broadway stages and the Manhattan jazz clubs of the 1950 and 1960's, I was astounded by the premier performance of Swing Street, astounded and transported to another place and time. The particularity of the American musical is immediately recognizable but, perhaps because it springs organically from the culture and a lifetime of exposure to the style, the sound and the sentiments of the place, perversely difficult to master, outside the culture. Keenly aware of this, taking my seat in the Stadttheater, what came over the footlights did nothing less than amaze.*

*It is almost a disservice to this masterful theater piece to discuss the parts that make it up; these are so seamlessly knit together and the effect of the whole produced an evening of such unflagging enjoyment. Still, what would a "musical" be without the music, and the evening makes abundantly clear that Thilo has mastered the genre. I quickly forgot that I was not a young man in a theatre in or around Times Square. Beginning with the music of the 20s & '30, and with fleeting excursions into later styles, Rhythm & Blues, Rock & Roll and even Rap, Thilo's compositions, from the propulsive rhythms of Swing to lilting romantic ballad set-pieces, never failed to excite and delight. The richness and variety of his music can hardly be taken in, in only one sitting. We have known this a long time; Thilo is more than a composer, he is the music; it is in him...he simply needs to write it down. What luck for us that this consummate musician, in his ongoing study of jazz history alighted on the golden age of jazz, its infancy in the 1920s and 30s, and conceived of revisiting New York's original "Swing Street", in story and song. With his big band, who are nothing less than an assembly of highly accomplished soloists, able to turn their hands, it seems, to any style of music, Thilo recreates this seminal moment in the life of jazz with unerring feeling and authenticity.*

*But a "musical" is also a play and without the text and an engaging story that develops out of it, the "rote Faden" to artfully knit the parts into a whole, it would become a mere recital. The book by Ewald does this with great élan. He brings to life the time and place, the hustle and bustle of New York, then and now, the experience of newcomers in a new and challenging environment, the romantic trials of lovers and, perhaps most central to the play, the ultimate substance beneath the revelry and romance, the descent of the innocent into the underworld (seduced by the Siren song of Swing), her eventual rescue and return to the Elysian Fields of the present, our Best-of-all-possible-Worlds; in short, the Orpheus legend in modern dress and syncopated rhythm. Without sacrificing drama, the text is full of humor and Ewald's characteristic charm and sweetness. It gives life and distinction to the varied principal roles and treats his creatures, with warmth. We are reminded that we share with them the dilemma of the human condition and that "The past is not dead, it is not even past."*

*"All the world is a stage..." well, perhaps, but not like the one we saw the other night. Hats off to the stage designer for a mis-en-scene worthy of Broadway in its heyday. From the raising of the curtain on the brilliantly conceived projection of New York's JFK, to the evocative representations of downtown tenement flats, the magical record shop, the bar rising out of the depths of the orchestra pit and the speak-easy, all seamlessly presented at the appointed moment by the full complement of the Theatre's skill battery of technicians, the stage sets astonished and delighted, worth every penny of the \$200 each we paid the scalpers on the Black Market for our tickets.*

*The costumes were equally attractive, evocative of the period, included many quick-changes and must have represented a tremendous amount of work in preparation by Kaja, herself a work of art, and her team.*

*Within this wonderful setting and dresses to kill, a cast of triple-threat singers, dancer, and actors took to the stage with amazing precision, unflagging youthful vigour, delightful voices and infectious charm, executing a choreography, stylistically spot on, "Broadway musical"-classic.*

*So much for the parts; returning now to the whole. A production of such complication, of such scope and size, so expensive to produce, bringing together professionals and artists from far and wide, a production that is such a departure from anything to be seen on any but the stages of principal cities, and finally, not least, an undertaking under the extraordinarily challenging restrictions of the moment, requires an impresario of equally extraordinary courage and imagination and one committed to the people of his theatre, his artists and his technicians. I believe I overheard him say, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." This is our Werner. Without his consistent fortitude and unstinting support, no such theatrical piece would ever mount the stage. All who know him, we in the audience, citizens of Fuerth and its suburbs (z/b Nürnberg) and a generation of artists have found a home within the four walls of his theatre, a place where classic and modern, the well-known and the experimental have been equally welcomed, presented with great success and reveled in. It is difficult to imagine a time in the life of this theatre without Werner at its helm.*

*Affectionately, Sevan"*