

Why the title? Writer's Note

Well, the actual story of the dead dog in the suitcase is one of the great modern urban myths. I won't tell it here. But you can Google it when you get home.

The myth apparently began life in the New York underground and has since become a meme of epic proportions. Many people lay claim to it happening to them, or (more often) a friend of a friend. It's become modern folklore. Which is fascinating to me. As our version of *The Beggar's Opera* feels like modern folklore too. If John Gay's original take was highwaymen and prostitutes, street thieves and corrupt officials, our version is about the mythic underbelly of "now". Ours is a world of mythic antiheroes, shadowy business, sexually deviant politicians, corporate conspiracy and chicanery. Here, desperate souls are forced to make a killing alongside big business, who are the ones *actually* getting away with murder. All the while, society slides further into the pit. *The Beggar's Opera* was set in London's savage underbelly. Ours is set in a metaphorical one. A kind of end-of-the-world end-of-the-pier show.

Because we'd modernised the material and, like Brecht before us who had fashioned a Beggar's Opera for his times, it felt like we needed to re-name our version too. And the dead dog urban myth was being bandied about in an early workshop for this show. It didn't land at the time. But it obviously went in on a subliminal level where it lurked in my brain like an alligator in a sewer.

As the writing process went on, I invented a new character for our story - Mayor Goodman who, I decided, was the last good man in town and who, in the first scene, Macheath assassinates. At the time of writing it, Goodman just so happened to be walking his dog at the time. The dog had to get it too, right? He was a witness! And when Goodman's widow got the dog's remains back in a bag the two dead doggy elements (my story and the urban myth) converged. And the title was born!

I added the "and other love songs" in brackets to land that this was a new "musical", of sorts. And because it made me laugh. And because it was audaciously long. I loved the title because it sounded to me like some fucked-up, proto-punk, anti-establishment record from back in the day. A collection of songs culled from the edge of existence. Some angry. Some sweet. Some about living. Some about death. But mainly, songs about love. And the intention was that they'd all combine to create a picture of a world hanging by a thread.

It became Widow Goodman's song; a tragic lament to her husband, who she loved more than anything. It's about her, and about the state of the world...

"Gone is the class, gone is the grace Now all she's got is a dead dog in a suitcase..."

It's a song that screams "Jesus Ker-rist! What *is* the world coming to?!!"

I could be wrong, but it felt as if John Gay was asking this very question about the world he was living, just as Brecht was furiously asking it with his *Threepenny* version. Sad to say, it feels very right to be asking it again, here, now, in 2019 as we bring this show back. In fact, it feels more pertinent than ever.

The world feels very strange right now. Very cruel, confusing and absurd. But there is still hope to fight for. And there is still love. Which is why, as a title, *Dead Dog in A Suitcase (and other love songs)* feels so very right. To me, anyway.

Carl Grose, Writer