

Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, but Antaeus certainly managed to pick up its mantle and carry it forth. All those reasons Andrew Robinson gave for doing this play (comparable to those that Brecht had for writing it) came through in loud, clear, and disturbingly complicated fashion.

The heart of Brecht's oft-cited much-abused theory of "alienation" is that theatre is theatre, not real life; this type of theatre abjures so-called "kitchen-sink" realism and the polished naturalism so typical in so much well-heeled single-set interior productions. This is theatre that celebrates the fact that it is theatre, embracing the madness of it all, drawing attention to the fact that narrative is a construct by having a narrator announce scenes and offer loglines of the action to follow. It's a kind of theatre that takes us in and out of the emotional lives of the characters, at one moment feeling for them and with them, the next being pushed back by some reminder that this is, after all, theatre, so that we can see their circumstances as if from a slightly abstracted perch. When it works, as it does in this production, it works like a bandit; when it doesn't . . . well, there's always intermission to look forward to.

Brecht's enduring appeal among theatre artists is that, at least for the most part, theatre folk have always hugged the lower rungs of the social order. They've always been suspect as subversives—a mutation of that suspicion attaches to the way in which the political opinions of movie stars are dismissed as both dangerous *and* meaningless (note the contradiction) even when some of these soap-boxers demonstrate a far surer grasp of issues than the professional pundits and pols. Like the actresses of Molière's troupe, the actor label has ever been tinged with the whiff of loose morals, loose living, and a promiscuity of ideas; at times, the words actress and prostitute were regarded as synonyms. To survive as a theatre artist, especially in a country where the performing arts are subsidized only at the major cultural institutional level, one must scramble like the camp-followers of Mother Courage's entourage. There's a natural sympathy among theatre folk for these "little people" living under the gun. With very little stretch, Mother Courage could be seen as the artistic director/star of an itinerant troupe of players.

Brecht's own complicated personal and political history, not to mention his interpretation of Marxism and its application to theatre, deserves its own essay. What's telling, however, is just how familiar and filled with common sense and simple humanity his values and ideas seem when brought to us in deeply entertaining and compelling productions of his plays, like this production of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. When the performing arts expose the greed and hypocrisy of the privileged and powerful, embrace solidarity with the weak, exploited, and oppressed, and whenever they mock the pretensions of the ruling elite and their lackeys, a great public service is done.

See Also:

[A good deal to chew, and not all of it edible: Brecht and \*Mother Courage\*](#)

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