

hands and faces at tiny make-up shelves as the audience wandered in. A visible and play-appropriately costumed ensemble of musicians played the pre-show with a consciously affected "amateur" air. Michele K. Short (costumes), Hohn Iacovelli (set), Ellen Monocroussos (lights), and Chuck Olsen (props) masterfully complemented one another's contributions. (The tale of how this oversized shed got turned into a performance space is epic theater in itself; that after so much hard dirty work their transformed space has been sold out from under the company is part of the on-going tragedy-comedy of theatre in Los Angeles.)

Antaeus has been around for fifteen years now. Its penchant is for classic theatre. It boasts a fairly large company of actors and other theatre artists in addition to a loyal following. The cast of this production of *Mother Courage*, with a number of roles, including a few key ones, double-cast, is rich in seasoned players, artists who've worked together often, some for many years. That shared history is what transforms a company into an ensemble and it shows in the playing. Anne Gee Byrd's tour-de-force performance in the titular role would not be nearly so affecting if not for this superb ensemble, each of whom claims a show-stealing moment. David Nichols of the *LA Times* described Ms. Byrd's brilliant and sturdy performance as "definitive." It certainly was for me.

In addition to her galvanic work, I was especially knocked out by Rhonda Aldrich's "Yvette," the ambitious hard-traveled prostitute who climbs the social ladder seduction by seduction. Emily Eiden's "Katrin," Mother's mute longing-for-love daughter, was a profoundly moving portrait of a girl's difficult path to womanhood, from burdensome offspring to helpmate to victim until her epiphany as drum-banging rebel who risks—and ultimately sacrifices—her life in order to save the inhabitants of a town of strangers about to be attacked and pillaged by yet another invading army. There was more in-your-face to-the-barricade rebellion in this slight young woman's defiant banging on a hand drum than you'll find in six road tours of "Les Miz." Henry Groener's "Cook," with whom Mother sustains a good-humored decade-long flirtation and who turns out to have been Yvette's first love and despoiler, managed to pull off the difficult task of evoking our sympathies for his plight as he scrapes for food and shelter and then deeply disappointing us when he reveals a streak of selfishness that is more detestable for its being so understandable.

Geoffrey Wade in his three different military roles, John Sloan and Tim Veneable as Mother's sons (from different fathers), John Apicella as the Recruiting Officer, Philip Proctor as the Chaplain with flexible denominational loyalties, and Janellen Steininger as the puckish, no-nonsense Narrator, each inhabit this play and their respective characters in ways that—how to put this?—actually made me want the play to be longer than it already is. I secretly wanted the central story fleshed out with sidebar tales of each of their lives, whole new plays featuring each—and this on a night when, for a full ten minutes, I had to sit on my hands to warm them and squirmed with the after-effects of the hot coffee I'd gulped at halftime. Like I said before, it was that good. It wasn't as if Antaeus had channeled