



photo by Elaine Mc Broom

Ralph Drischell playing a general, and Gigi Bermingham as Yvette, show the audience how war can be profitable in Brecht's play "Mother Courage."

Antaeus Company Explores the Spoils of War with "Mother Courage"

BY MADELEINE SHANER

There's no denying, war is hell, regardless of which side you're on. Bertolt Brecht's well-known study in irony takes war by the scruff of its unwashed neck and shakes it until it rattles. It's generally

considered that if you want to speak out against something, your best policy is to show all its horror and depravity, all its pain and suffering, all its chilling consequences. "Mother Courage and her Children" was written in 1939, on the brink of

WWII, but Brecht chose the seventeenth century Thirty Years War that pitted Protestants against Catholics to make his point. Brecht wrote, "...war is a continuation of business," and who could doubt that recent parallels latch into his beliefs.

Antaeus Company's production of Mother Courage is exceptionally well served by its rustic setting in a time-aged warehouse that can easily be imagined as temporary shelter for battling armies, weary soldiers, the people who hide from them, those who serve them, those who die, those who somehow survive, and those who profit from war. (Set design by John Iacovelli; Lighting by Ellen Monocroussos.) Ann Gee Byrd is a magnificent Mother Courage, an itinerant peddler who makes no differentiation between sides when it comes to commerce. Everything is about survival, hers and her children's and, not least, the system that supports them maybe better in war than in peace. She gives a transcendent performance as a mother, a scavenger, a purveyor of anything that can be classified as goods and services, a fiercely opinionated howl of a woman, unafraid, unbreakable, an angry goddess who can absorb whatever is thrown her way, and find a way to use it, overcome it, and make it work for her. She is Courage. The character and the actor are aptly named. But in the cruellest cut of all, Mother Courage cannot save her own children from their terrible destiny.

Several of the roles are double-cast; several of the actors play more than one role. Outstanding are Harry Groener as The Cook (also played by Bruce French); Philip Proctor as the refugee Pastor without a parish (also played by John Apicella); Emily Eiden as Katrin, Mother's mute daughter (shared with Katy Tsyzkiewicz); Rhonda Aldrich as Yvette, a camp follower (also played by

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Gigi Bermingham); Terry Evans as a Commander, a Soldier and a Clerk; Janellen Steiniger as the Narrator; John Sloan, Matthew Jaeger, Nathan Patrick, Eugene Alper, Ralph Drischell, Andrew Matthews, Adam Meyer, Tim Venable, Geoffrey Wade and Josh Clark.

Director Andrew Robinson has mined the play for its courageous stance, its familiar Brechtian didacticism, its vitality and, unexpectedly for non-Brechtians, its humor. He is blessed with a splendid cast of dedicated actors who know what they have in their grasp.

Jan Powell is the Musical Director, presiding royally over musicians: Eugene Alper, John Apicella, Ralph Drischell, Terry Evans, Matthew Jaeger, Eric Johnson, John Sloan, Janellen Steiniger and Alicia Wollerton, multiple Costume design is by Michele K. Short; inventive Property Design by Chuck Olsen. Musical staging is by Harry Groener; fight choreography by Matthew Jaeger, and exterior murals are by Judith Von Euer. This is a magnificent production, not to be missed, worth as many visits as you can fit into your schedule. In keeping with the theme, there's a soup kitchen with great hot soup fronting the theatre.

All too soon, Antaeus will be without a home. This wonderful warehouse and the New Place Theatre attached to it are destined to become a mini-mall. Just what we needed.

Antaeus Company, Warehouse complex at NewPlace Theatre Center, 4900 Vineland Ave., North Hollywood; April 15 to May 22, Thursday to Saturday at 8:00pm, Sunday at 7:00pm; \$20.00-\$25.00; (866)811-4111 or www.theatermania.com.