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Mother Courage and Her Children

Reviewed By Terry Morgan

Bertolt Brecht's tale--of how even those who try to go along with a war, those who see a profit in it for themselves instead of a tragedy, will eventually be ground down just like those who oppose it--is given an excellent production by the Antaeus Company in its new warehouse theatre. Director Andrew J. Robinson uses the space cleverly in an environmental staging, and all three sections of the audience are regularly surrounded by musicians and marching soldiers, effectively drawing the viewers deeper into the story. Robinson has chosen to do the show with a relatively sparse set, which focuses the attention on his strong cast members (show is double-cast), who bring this story of world-weary cynicism, dark humor, and suffering humanity to vigorous life.

Mother Courage (Anne Gee Byrd) runs a canteen wagon during the European Thirty Years' War, following whichever side needs supplies in the endless conflict. She's nothing if not a realist, but she tries to keep her three children--Eilif (Matthew Jaeger), Swiss Cheese (Tim Venable), and Kattrin (Katy Tyszkiewicz)--safe by her side. The war does not make this easy or even always possible, but she continues on, regardless, making deals with new acquaintances such as The Chaplain (John Apicella), The Cook (Harry Groener), and the prostitute Yvette (Gigi Bermingham), doing whatever she needs to do to keep herself and her children alive.

Byrd is marvelous as Mother Courage, offering a bracing performance that is equal parts cold calculation, black humor, and fierce motherly love. Her expression at the play's conclusion, when it has become apparent that the war can eventually even break this tough old woman down, and yet she still has to chase after the troops--there will be no rest for her, besides death--is haunting work. Jaeger and Venable are good as the two sons, and Tyszkiewicz is ultimately very moving in an expressive performance as the silent Kattrin, the miseries of the war written large upon her face. Apicella and Bermingham offer expert support, and Groener is superb as the last man to fool Mother Courage with hope. In a time when countries are manipulated into religious wars and the common man often has to do whatever he can to survive, Mother Courage is unfortunately once again timely. This Antaeus production is a raw shout of anger and despair, and it deserves a large audience.

"Mother Courage and Her Children"

presented by the
Antaeus Company
at NewPlace
Theatre Center,
4900 Vineland
Ave., North
Hollywood. Thu.-
Sat. 8 p.m. Apr. 15-
May 22. \$20-25.
(866) 811-4111.