



Brecht-fest an alienating bargain

Grand Mother a tasty sample of iconoclasm

By KEN KEOBKE

Where in the world is there a war today? Afghanistan, Lebanon . . . If you can think of less than a dozen places, it's not surprising. Despite the daily parade of atrocities on the evening news, most Canadians still lead a sheltered existence unaware that today there are 50 regional wars in progress.

And this is publicist Christine Heath's response when asked why Equity Showcase Theatre is doing an anti-war play in 1986. Canadians need to be made aware, she said. The play they have chosen to do is Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the story of a woman and her travels with her three children (one named Swiss Cheese) across the war torn landscape of the Thirty Years War (1618-48).

The occasion for the production is the Bertolt Brecht festival, marking the 30th anniversary of the death of Brecht, perhaps the most influential playwright of the 20th century. Brecht wrote most of his pieces in grand epic style with large casts. Directed by LA import Stephen Kent, *Mother Courage* requires two musicians and 18 actors, making it a major spectacle. The Bathurst Theatre stage has even been enlarged for this production in particular.

With all this extravagance, it's an extra delight that admission to the show is free . . . a bargain. Although the actors are highly respected professionals, including former co-chairperson of the York Theatre Program, Michelle George in the lead role, all are working without



THE KING OF VERFREMPELUNGSEFFEKTS: Bertolt Brecht

being paid.

There are several reasons for this. For some, it is an opportunity to perform in an important play which is seldom produced. Others are attracted by the professional workshops during the uncommonly long six-week rehearsal period. But for all, it is an opportunity to showcase their talents in front of the Toronto theatre community's directors and producers, as has been done for 25 years by Equity Showcase Theatre.

Mother Courage and Her Children is at the Bathurst Street Theatre, 736 Bathurst, October 15, 16-19 and 20-25. Tickets are free but must be reserved by calling 963-9226. Do go.

Brechtianians converge on TO

By DAVID BURGESS

Thirty years after his untimely death at 58, an iconoclastic Marxist playwright, exiled from both Nazi-Germany and the McCarthy years in the U.S., will loom large over Toronto's theatrical landscape.

From Oct. 21-26, U of T and the local theatre community will host *Brecht: Thirty Years After*, a combined conference and theatre festival which will be a retrospective assessment of the impact made by the

German playwright, poet, director, and theatrical theorist.

Bertolt Brecht is viewed by many as the greatest playwright of the twentieth century, a man whose influence on drama is rivaled only by Samuel Beckett, and whose theories of acting provide a viable alternative to those of Konstantine Stanislavsky.

Brecht's most famous plays include *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Fortunately, for Toronto theatre-goers, those plays and much more Brechtiana will be available to us over the next three weeks.

He tried to develop a theatre for the scientific age, one which appeals primarily to the intellect. To this end Brecht developed ways of making plays alien to their audience called *verfremdungseffekte* (alienation-effects). These include speeches made by actors directly to the audience, songs which break the narrative flow of the play and comment on it, placards with scene titles, plot outlines displayed on the stage, and much more.

Among the distinguished visitors to the Brecht Festival will be the English-speaking Big Three of Brecht scholarship and translation: Martin Esslin (*Brecht: The Man and His Work*), John Willett (co-editor of the Methuen editions of Brecht's work), and Eric Bentley (chief American translator and apostle of Brecht).

Also visiting is director John McGrath (of the theatre company 7:84 of Scotland and England), and playwrights Franz-Xavier Kroetz (*Michi's Blood*), Rick Salutin (1837: *The Farmer's Revolt*), and George Ryga (*The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*).

Unquestionably the highlight of the festival is the North American premiere of the company founded by Brecht, The Berliner Ensemble, which is bringing a company of 90 to perform *The Caucasian Chalk*

Circle and *The Threepenny Opera*. The irony here is that they will perform at capitalist Ed Mirvish's Royal Alex. Good seats are still available, and well-worth the high price.

Another show which shouldn't be missed is *Mother Courage*, with former York professor Michelle George in the title role, being presented at Harbourfront's Premier Dance Theatre, for free. It's run has already started, and goes until Oct. 25. This is perhaps Brecht's best play.

Four companies will visit from the province of Quebec: The National Theatre School's English language students will present *Round-Heads and Peaked-Heads*, by Brecht, at the Canadian Repertory.

Quebec City's Le Theatre Parminou will perform their collective creation, *Ca Creve Les Yeux, Ca Creve Le Coeur* on October 21 and 22 at George Ignatieff Theatre.

Montreal's Carbone 14 presents another collective creation, called *Le Rail* at the Massey Ferguson Warehouse. It is a bilingual work in the non-literal, imagistic style seen in *The Dragon Trilogy* at the DuMaurier World Stage.

Le Grande Republique, also of Montreal, finish out Parminou's week at the Ignatieff with *Visa Pour L'Amerique* by Madeline Greffard.

British Director Jonathon Chadwick has come to Toronto to direct the University College students in *Drums In The Night*, at the UC Playhouse, running until November 2.

Also from Britain, comes the theatre company 7:84, with two shows written by their artistic director, John McGrath, *The Albanach*, and *The Baby and the Bath-Water*, both at Harbourfront.

This is just a partial list. There is a film/video series at the AGO, shows by Toronto companies, an exhibit of sculpture, late-night cabaret, and other events. This festival/conference is the largest Brecht event ever. For more information call 978-4418.

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