

## CONTENTS

The Play  
Meet the Playwright  
Epic Theater  
The Wars of Mother Courage  
Music in Brecht  
Three Big Questions  
Additional Resources

## THE PLAY

Anna Fierling – better known as “**Mother Courage**,” sings “War’s a business and it’s just like all the rest.”

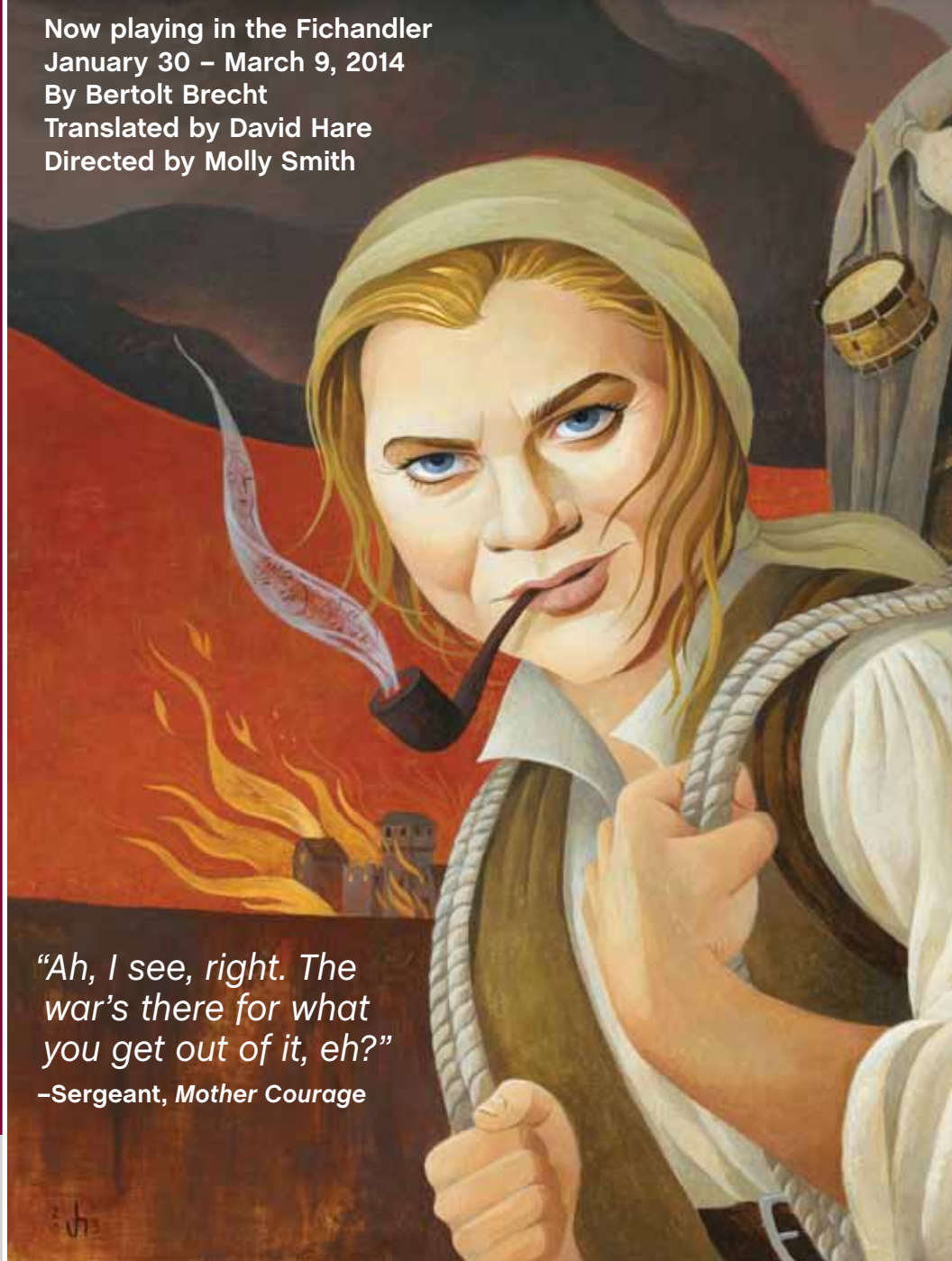
With her beloved cart and three children by her side, Mother Courage makes her living off the war that is raging in Europe. A fearless businesswoman, she earned her name when she drove her cart through a bombardment in order to sell her 50 loaves of bread before they went moldy. She loves her children, too: the brash **Eilif**, honest **Swiss Cheese** and kind, mute **Katrin**.

Mother Courage can lie, cheat and con her way out of just about any situation. Can she keep her family safe, though, during a war?

As Mother Courage and her children try to navigate the war-ravaged landscape of Europe, the play asks us, if war is a business, who profits? What is the cost of war? Who can survive it? What remains after war ends? ●

# MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

Now playing in the Fichandler  
January 30 – March 9, 2014  
By Bertolt Brecht  
Translated by David Hare  
Directed by Molly Smith



*“Ah, I see, right. The war’s there for what you get out of it, eh?”*

–Sergeant, *Mother Courage*

Major support for this program is provided by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation.

*Mother Courage and Her Children* is generously sponsored by Hank & Charlotte Schlosberg, Margot Kelly and WAMU.

WAMU 88.5 FM AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RADIO

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



Bertolt Brecht

“Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.”

–Bertolt Brecht

One of the 20th century’s most influential playwrights, Bertolt Brecht was born in Augsburg, Germany on February 10, 1898. Brecht attended the University of Munich to study medicine and served as a medical orderly for the German army in World War I. During this time, Brecht became disillusioned by the horrors of war and began writing politically charged plays.

Brecht was influenced by the writings of Karl Marx, a German sociologist with radical views on **capitalism**. Such Marxist ideas were strongly opposed by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. As Hitler rose to power, Brecht’s plays were banned. Ultimately Brecht fled Germany, first to European nations and then the United States.

Brecht continued to write while in exile and produced plays that were critical of the Nazi regime and the world’s political situation. Of these plays, the anti-war *Mother Courage and Her Children* became one of his best-known and critically acclaimed works.

Brecht returned to Germany in 1947 and, two years later, formed the Berliner Ensemble, a theater company in Berlin. Brecht continued to write and direct plays in Germany until he died of heart failure on August 14, 1956. ●

**capitalism** - an economic and political system in which trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state

# EPIC THEATER



Brecht believed theater should not to imitate life, but educate the audience. “Epic Theater” is a style of performance created by Brecht. The form constantly reminds audiences that they are watching a play in order to distance them emotionally from the story. In doing this, Brecht wants audiences to analyze and evaluate what they are watching instead of getting lost in the play. Audiences are challenged to see the larger, social picture rather than get caught up in emotion and fiction. ●

Brecht called these theatrical techniques *verfremdungseffekt*, often translated as “alienation effect.”

	Realistic Theater	Epic Theater
Script	Scenes follow standard progression (e.g. chronological order). Audience is meant to be immersed in the story.	Scenes tell individual stories and may be unrelated to each other. Songs, dances or commentary are used to disrupt action and distance audience from the story.
Acting	Actors create emotional connections to their characters in order to portray a realistic person on stage. Audience is encouraged to become emotionally invested in the fate of the character.	Actors do not establish emotional relationships to characters, but comment on their actions objectively. Audience is encouraged to criticize the character.
Technical	Stage equipment is hidden. Mood is set using lighting and sound to keep audience “in the moment” of the play.	Stage equipment usually visible. Scene changes made in plain view of audience. Jarring effects are used to take audience out of the action of the play.

Table adapted from a study guide written by Jim McNabb for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, November, 2009.



**ACTIVITY** Brecht used theater to express his political and social views. Using an art form of your choice (poetry, music, etc.), express a political or social view that is important to you. Your art should challenge an audience to see your point of view.



# THE WARS OF MOTHER COURAGE

“What is a performance of *Mother Courage and Her Children* primarily intended to show? That in wartime the big profits are not made by little people. That war, which is a continuation of business by other means, makes human virtues fatal even to their possessors. That no sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war.” —Bertolt Brecht

In the play, war rages for 12 years, and Mother Courage travels over 1,900 miles with her cart.



## THIRTY YEARS' WAR

The Thirty Years' War, the setting of the play, was fought from 1618-1648, primarily in what is now Germany. It began as a civil war between Catholic and Protestant factions. It grew to involve most of the countries of Europe, becoming an international war of religion between Catholic and Protestant powers.

## WORLD WARS I & II

While the play is set in the landscape of the Thirty Years' War, Brecht wrote it in 1939. World War I had ended in 1918 and approximately 16 million soldiers and civilians were dead. Just 20 years after this “war to end all wars,” Hitler was rising to power and Europe was on the brink of total war again. Why do you think Brecht, a 20th-century writer, set the play during a 17th century war?



### ACTIVITY

In designing the war-ravaged landscape of the play, the director and set designer – Molly Smith and Todd Rosenthal – were inspired by the post-WWII paintings of Anselm Kiefer. What would inspire your set design for a play set during a war? Design your own set for the play. Remember this production is in-the-round, with audience members sitting on all sides of the stage.

# MUSIC IN BRECHT

Unlike in a musical, music in Brecht is intended to jolt the audience out of the action of the play. Music is not only used as accompaniment or to express a character's feelings. It is often used as commentary.

Arena Stage's production features a new score, written by James Sugg. Inspired by Eastern European traditions and the "gypsy-punk" music of bands like Gogol Bordello, the music is sung and played by the actors. They carry their instruments with them, creating a roving band of musicians. ●



## THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1. Who benefits and who suffers during war?
2. What is a mother's duty to her children?
3. How far would you go for self-preservation?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

*Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* by Bertolt Brecht and John Willet

*The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht

### ON THE WEB

An Introduction to Brechtian Theatre: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-828KqtTka](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-828KqtTka)

Tony Kushner: "Mother Courage is not just an anti-war play"  
[www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/sep/08/tony-kushner-mother-courage](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/sep/08/tony-kushner-mother-courage)

Thirty Years War: [www.history.com/topics/thirty-years-war](http://www.history.com/topics/thirty-years-war)

### FILM

*Theater of War*: Lorber Films, 2010.

### Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.

Visit the restroom before the show starts.

Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.

Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.

Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!

Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.

Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.

Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!



the mead center  
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
Phone: (202) 554-9066  
Fax: (202) 488-4056

Written by Ariel Warmflash  
Edited by Rebecca Campana  
Some content adapted from  
*Arena's Page: A Man's A Man*, written  
by Ashley Forman and Sarah Coleman  
for the 2003-04 season.

Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org)  
for more information on  
Arena Stage productions  
and educational opportunities.