

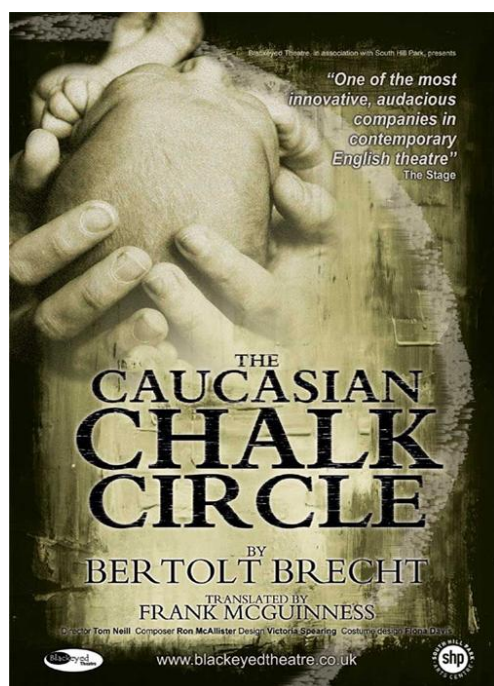
The Caucasian Chalk Circle

by Bertolt Brecht

Education Pack



Producer Adrian McDougall Director Tom Neill Music Ron McAllister
Design Victoria Spearing Costume Design Fiona Davis Lighting Design Oliver Welsh



Welcome...

To the Caucasian Chalk Circle Education Pack. Blackeyed Theatre and South Hill Park are very excited to be working together once again, this time on a piece from one of the seminal practitioners and playwrights of the twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht.

The following pages have been designed to support study leading up to and after your visit to see the production. This pack has been put together by a teacher, a theatre-practitioner, a producer and a director, all of whom are actively working within the industry and on this production. This pack aims to supply thoughts and facts that can serve as discussion starters, handouts and practical activity ideas.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this pack please email me at jo.wright@southhillpark.org.uk I hope you will enjoy the unique experience that this show offers enormously. See you there!

Jo Wright, Head of Creative Learning, South Hill Park Arts Centre

Contributors

Jill Neill has over twenty years experience teaching German and English to GCSE and A-Level, heading a German department for some years, developing study skills programmes and undertaking one-to-one tuition. Now retired, she has always striven to help children become critical and independent thinkers and learners.

Jo Wright trained in English Literature and Theatre Studies at the University of Leeds, graduating in 2005. She has worked for York Theatre Royal, the Shakespeare Schools Festival and The Dukes Theatre and Cinema, Lancaster as an Education Practitioner, and as a freelance dramaturg/producer. Jo now heads up the Creative Learning programme at South Hill Park Arts Centre.

Adrian McDougall is founder and artistic director of Blackeyed Theatre. He has produced all of their UK tours, which include the national revival of *Oh What A Lovely War*, the world premiere of Berkoff's *Oedipus* and Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. Adrian also works as a theatre director and actor.

Tom Neill trained at the University of Huddersfield in Music with Theatre Studies. He has 8 years experience as a theatre professional, working for a number of organisations as a director, actor, composer and script writer.

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About Blackeyed Theatre

Blackeyed Theatre is a mid-scale touring theatre company established in 2004 to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences alike, and to offer challenging, high quality theatre to the mid-scale touring circuit. The company specialises in reviving modern classics and staging established titles in innovative ways, using small ensembles of actor/musicians to create theatre that is audacious, fresh and far bigger than the sum of its parts. Since 2004 Blackeyed Theatre has embarked on national tours of *Alfie* (Bill Naughton), *The Cherry Orchard* (Anton Chekhov), *Oh What a Lovely War* (Joan Littlewood), the world premiere of *Oedipus* (Steven Berkoff) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Bertolt Brecht).

In 2009, Blackeyed Theatre became an associate company of South Hill Park Arts Centre. In 2008, the company produced its first Christmas show, *A Christmas Carol*, and a year later *Peter Pan*.

Blackeyed Theatre is totally self-sufficient and receives no funding, creating innovative, challenging theatre that's also commercially viable. It achieves this by producing work that audiences want to see but in ways that challenge their expectations, by bringing together artists with a genuine passion for the work they produce, and through an appreciation that works of art with a mass appeal do not have to be presented in a dumbed-down way. By offering a theatrical experience that's both artistically excellent and affordable, audiences and theatres are far more sustainable in the long term. And responding to demand ensures that more people see innovative theatre.

Blackeyed Theatre has a growing national reputation for creating dynamic theatre using live music and great performances to tell stories with honesty and passion.



The Cast

Ruth Cataroche - Azdak / Aniko / Ensemble

Ruth trained at East 15 Acting School.

Theatre Credits include Ruby in *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Wizard Theatre Company), Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Raksha* in The Mowgli Stories (Illyria Theatre Company), Crab in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Sandy in *Jabberwocky* (Sixth Sense Theatre for Young People), *Lacemaker's*, *Married to the Job*, *Carrying on*, *Mrs Brunel* (Mikron Theatre Company), Sarah in *The Seamorgan's Child* (Chalkfoot Theatre Company), Ela Delahay in *Charlie's Aunt*, Starveling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (British Touring Shakespeare Company).

Ruth is also currently featuring in a commercial playing a Teacher from the 1980s!



Anna Glynn - Grusha Vachnadze / Natella Abashvili / Ensemble

Anna graduated from the Guildford School of Acting in 2008 where she won the Sir Michael Redgrave Award for Acting.

Theatre credits include: *Skellig* (Birmingham Theatre Company, National Tour), *Hi Ho* (Gilt & Grime, The Cobden Club), *A Christmas Carol* (MokitaGrit, Kings Head Theatre), *The Trappe Family* (Croydon Warehouse Theatre) and *Arcadia* (The Oxford Playhouse). Film credits include: *Fragments* (Production B, Independent Student Film)

Anna lives in Oxford where she and her partner run a young people's theatre school, **The Oxford Academy of Performing Arts**.



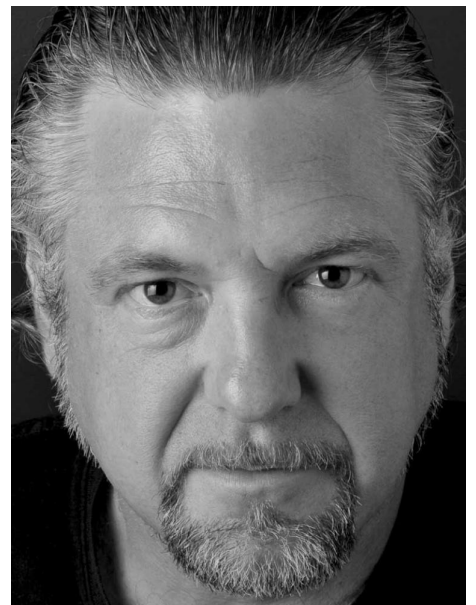
Greg Patmore - Georgi Abashvili / Fat Prince / Lavrenti / Ensemble

Becoming an actor in his early forties, roles include:

STAGE: Captain Hook - *Peter Pan* (Pantoni Pantomimes); Gavin/Jim - *Dolly the Sheep* (New Perspectives Theatre Co); Leonato - *Much Ado About Nothing* (Page-2 Stage Productions); Chaplain Proctor - *Crying in the Chapel* (Fink on Theatre Productions); Demon King - *Mother Goose* (The James Brandon Company); Lord Capulet - *Romeo & Juliet* / Merlin - *Merlin the Magician* (Chapterhouse Theatre Company); The Colonel - *Deepcut: Scenes from an Inquiry* (Roland Egan Productions); critically acclaimed Martin Heidegger - *Hannah and Martin* (Nefeli/Courtyard Production); Derek Figg - *Chain Reaction*; Ted Dibble - *Centre Stage to the left a bit* (Think Big Presents).

FILM: Pinkie - *The Trailer* (Jobbernowl Films); Martin - *Don't Worry About Me* (Tubedale Films (2009) Dir. David Morrissey); Claude Trenaman - *Charlie Noades RIP* (Northstar Pictures (2009) Dir. Jim Doyle).

SHORT FILMS: Jerry - *Late Night Barber Shop*; Father - *Olivia* (RTS Award for



best short fiction 2009); Carl Evans - *Five Steps*; Gary - *Happy Birthday*.

TELEVISION: Ricky the Biker - *Coronation Street*; *Hanrahan Investigates*; *Hollyoaks in the City*; BBC's *Casualty 1906*.

Paul Taylor - Arkadi Tsheidze / Ensemble

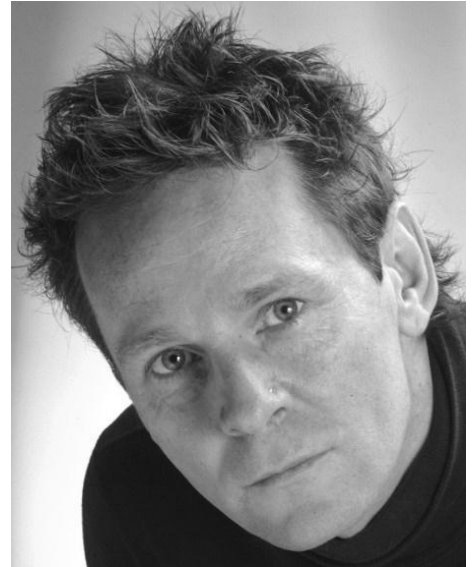
Paul has toured extensively around Britain and the rest of Europe, nearly fulfilling his dream of travelling in a troupe, in a caravan, to a town, put up the stage, do the show, pack up and move on.

Paul has enjoyed a varied and interesting career including Emcee in *Cabaret*, Mozart in *Amadeus*, Tom Jones in *The History of Tom Jones*, several outings as Oberon/Theseus in *A Midsummers Night Dream*, Norman in *The Dresser*, Peter Quinn/Miles in *Turn of the Screw*, Macheath in *The Beggars Opera*, Dorian Gray in *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, Jesus in *Godspell* and Orin and others in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Arturo Ui in **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, Yvan in **Art*, Paul in **Misery*, Willy in **Blue Remembered Hills*, Mme Ranyevskaya/Firs in a new adaptation of Chekhov's **The Cherry Orchard*, Dick/Schnitzerschitz in *Ha Ha Hitler*. His most recent theatre role, this year, being Jerome in Tom Neill's adaptation of *Three Men in a Boat*. (*all with Blackeyed Theatre.)

His film credits include; Tim in *Curtain Call*, Jamie in *Unbelievably British* (nominated in several international film festivals, Short Film category) and Tim in *Chocolates and Champagne* - a film he enjoyed making immensely.

Christmas, always a fun time for actors, has given just as much variety and has seen Paul as Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, King Pie Rat in *Dick Whittington*, as an Ugly Sister in *Cinderella* (twice - he looks good in a frock and has great legs), The Devil and everything else in *The Snow Queen*, Big Bad Wolf in *Big Bad Wolf*, Ghost of Christmas Past and others in *A Christmas Carol*, Widow Twanky in *Aladdin* and Fleur (yet another sister!) in *Beauty and The Beast*.

Lately, Paul has been enjoying several interesting projects in Norwich and the rest of Norfolk. Most recently as part of *An impossible Journey: The Art of Tadeusz Kantor*, a site specific theatre piece as part of an exhibition of this great Polish Artist's work and is part of an international company developing a site specific piece for installation on a Steam Train Journey.



Lee Drage - Simon Chachava / Corporal / Jessup / Ensemble

Lee trained at the Guildford School of Acting.

Theatre credits include: *Robin Hood* (The Castle, Wellingborough), *She Stoops To Conquer*, *CloudCuckooLand*, *Hot Mikado* (Watermill theatre, International tour), *Saturday Night* (Arts Theatre, West End) and the 2008 revival of *Oh What A Lovely War* with Blackeyed Theatre. Lee is also part of 'Lonely Duck Productions', a company specialising in the development of new comedy writing.



The Creative Team

Fiona Davis - Costume Design

Fiona graduated from De Montfort University with a BA Honours degree in Design Crafts. Initially her experience began working as a production tutor for Pegasus Theatre in Oxford. Whilst there she designed costumes and sets for a number of independent projects. Incredibly passionate about theatrical costume, Fiona then embarked on a professional career as a freelance costume designer from 2004. She has costumed *Cinderella*, *Henry V*, *Aladdin*, *Oliver!*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Talking Heads*, *The Tempest*, *Peter Pan* and *The Importance of Being Oscar* for South Hill Park; *The Resistible Rise Of Arturo Ui*, *Oedipus* and *Oh What A Lovely War* for Blackeyed Theatre, *Buccaneer* for Ocean Theatre, *R&J* for Original Theatre, *Vincent In Brixton*, *Othello* and *Journey's End* for Original and Icarus Theatre and *M*ss*ing* for Talawa Theatre Company. She has had exhibitions of her work in Banbury, Oxfordshire and two exhibitions as part of the New Designers Show in Islington London. Fiona continues to relish the challenge working with directors, set designers and performers to capture their vision and is delighted that she is working with Blackeyed theatre again on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Ron McAllister - Composer

Ron was born in Glasgow, studied music at Glasgow University and then went on to complete a post grad in Theatre Studies at University College, Cardiff. He composed music for many shows in Glasgow which were performed at Glasgow Arts Centre (*Agamemnon*, *Woyzeck*, *The Hard Man*) before moving South to take up the position of Head of Music for South Hill Park Arts Centre. At South Hill Park, Ron wrote music for many shows and musically directed many others (*Chicago*, *Girls of Slender Means*, *Trafford Tanzi*). He also received commissions from the Scottish Arts Council to write music for Scottish Youth Theatre's productions from 1984-1988 (including Jonathan Harvey's *The Colonist*, John McGrath's *The Games A Bogey* and Denise Coffey's *Lizzie's Strategy*). He wrote and conducted a large site-specific piece - *Putting The Sun In Its Place*, performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Scottish Youth Theatre at the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1988.

In 1990 Ron launched an arts centre in the Borders (The Maltings in Berwick Upon Tweed), working as Artistic Director there for two and a half years, and his musical adaptation of *James and The Giant Peach* toured nationally from there in 1991. Later in 1991 Ron moved to Huddersfield to become founder director of the Lawrence Batley Theatre, which he launched in 1994. In 1995 he produced his first opera there, as a co-production with Opera North - *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ron has continued to compose for theatre since then, most recently from his base at South Hill Park Arts Centre, where he was appointed Chief Executive in 2001. Recent productions include *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and *Oedipus* (national tours with Blackeyed Theatre).

Tom Neill - Director

Tom grew up in Wokingham, Berkshire and spent his early years performing with community drama and music groups. He studied Music with Theatre Studies at Huddersfield University.

His credits as a theatre director include *Talking Heads*, *The Tempest* (both South Hill Park), *Misery* (Blackeyed Theatre), his own adaptations of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (also Blackeyed Theatre) and Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men In A Boat* (Pentameters). He is proud to have directed South Hill Park's 25th anniversary celebration *The Importance of Being Oscar*, which recently toured the UK and Ireland in a production by the Original Theatre Company.

Tom also works as an actor, composer and script writer. See www.tomneill.co.uk for more details.

Victoria Spearing - Design

Victoria became a freelance theatre designer after graduating from Bretton Hall in 2001. She has worked with Blackeyed Theatre on *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *The Caretaker*, *Blue Remembered Hills*, *Misery*, *The Long Lost Legend of Robin Hood* and *Art*. Other set designs include *Summer Holiday*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Norfolk's Rose*, *Whistle Down the Wind* and *The BFG*. In addition she has designed the sets for the last eight pantomimes at South Hill Park and also for the Broadway Theatre in Barking. She also runs art and theatre workshops for children and adults, and has made props for most of the major London museums.

Oliver Welsh - Lighting Design

Oliver is a freelance lighting designer / technician based in Berkshire. Recent work includes: Deputy Electrician for Matthew Bourne's *Edward Scissorhands* international tour (London, Athens and Antwerp sections), Chief Electrician for *Concert They Never Gave* UK tour (Bill Kenwright), Programmer for *Hello Dolly!* Regents Park Open Air Theatre, Event Electrics for *Golf Live 2010*, Stoke Park, Bucks.

Recent design credits include *Othello* UK tour, *Hamlet* UK tour (Icarus Theatre Collective), *Carousel* (Crowthorne Musical Players) and the 2010 Oxford Castle summer season, as well as the main stage for *Big Day Out* 2007/8/9 (South Hill Park, Bracknell / Sandhurst Carnival). Oliver was Associate Lighting Designer for *Beauty and the Beast* (South Hill Park, Bracknell), *Shakespeare's R+J* (Icarus Theatre Collective, London and UK tour) and *Office Rocker* (Freeflow Productions, South Hill Park), and he regularly designs for Park Opera and Opera at Bearwood and several Thames Valley based community groups.

Jo Wright - Education Advisor

Jo has been interested in the theatre since the age of seven when she was cast as The Bird Woman in a school production of *Mary Poppins* - and has been up to her neck in it ever since, working in design, production and even occasionally on stage.

Completing her formal training at the University of Leeds in 2005, Jo has a BA Honours Degree in English Literature and Theatre Studies. She has since worked for York Theatre Royal, The Shakespeare Schools Festival and The Dukes Theatre and Cinema, Lancaster as an Education Practitioner, as well as freelancing as a dramaturg and producer. Jo now heads up the Creative Learning programme at South Hill Park Arts Centre in Berkshire, running a diverse range of projects and training schemes, as well as working with visiting artists and practitioners. This is her fourth collaboration with Blackeyed Theatre.

Producing and Touring a Play

The following table shows the process we went through to bring *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to the stage.

October 2009	From a short-list of titles, decide on Caucasian Chalk Circle as the preferred play. Factors to be considered are potential audience and commerciality, artistic value, the logistics in terms of scale and 'tourability', the casting and the cost.
	Establish an initial budget for the production, including estimated costs for marketing, design and production of set, props and costumes, lighting design, wages for actors, the director and company stage manager, accommodation, transport, insurance and royalties. This will tell you how much you need to take each week and for how many weeks.
November 2009	Apply for the rights to do Caucasian Chalk Circle (The availability of rights will depend on whether other companies are performing the show, and whether a major London production is being planned). In particular the period of time and geographical area will affect the availability of the show.
	Confirm the director and composer (when securing the rights to perform a play by Brecht, the Brecht Estate must approve both the director and composer).
	Establish an initial 'vision' for the production. In other words, what will this production set out to achieve?
December 2009	Design initial image and write the text that will tell both theatres and audiences what it's about and who it will appeal to. This will be strongly influenced by the director's vision.
January 2010	Begin booking venues for the show. Send marketing materials out to theatres/schools. Theatres vary massively in their lead times for booking in touring productions. Some may book shows in 3 months in advance, others over a year in advance. Tour-booking will continue throughout Spring, Summer and Autumn 2010. When booking theatres, consider its existing programme of events and as a result its core audience. Consider how many seats it has, the size of its playing area and its technical facilities when determining the suitability of the show for that particular venue. Consider where the venue is geographically and whether it is close enough to the venue you're in the day before. Remember that theatres that are close to each other often won't programme the same productions.
February 2010	Confirm a set designer, costume designer and lighting designer and send out scripts.
	Throughout the Spring and Summer, information about the show and images are sent to theatres for use in their season brochures.
May 2010	Book rehearsal space.
June 2010	Begin work on education pack.
July 2010	Confirm the casting breakdown and advertise casting requirements.
August 2010	Auditions.
	Send contracts and scripts to actors.
	Hold production meeting, bringing the artistic team together to discuss ideas and the progress of the production.
September 2010	Costume designer measures cast members and creates face moulds to make masks.
	Costume making begins.
	The composition of the music begins.
October 2010	Confirm final tour dates.

October 2010	Design leaflets and posters, get them printed and sent to each venue on the tour.
	Write a media Pack, including company, crew and cast details, press release, sample mail out letter, tour dates and photos, to be sent to theatres.
	Send education pack to theatres.
November 2010	Recruit a company stage manager.
	Book accommodation for company whilst on tour.
	Prop sourcing begins.
December 2010	Set construction begins.
	Send the rehearsal schedule to the cast and artistic team.
	Design the show programme.
January 2011	Rehearsals begin.
	Photo shoot of actors in costume.
	Costume call.
	Print programmes.
	Book transport for the company while on tour.
	Check insurance covers everything necessary.
	Carry out a risk assessment of the production.
	Send out technical riders to each theatre (a technical rider confirms the show's technical requirements so there are no surprises on the day!)
	Invite reviewers to the press night.
23 January 2011	Get-in to theatre, rigging, focusing and plotting of lights, technical rehearsal.
24 January 2011	Dress rehearsals.
	Take production photos.
25 January 2011	Opening Performance.
	Send out production photos to theatres and press.

Brecht Timeline

1898 Born, Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht in Augsburg

1904-1917 Primary and secondary education

1914 First contribution to a newspaper, a short piece of prose fiction

1917 Starts studying Medicine and Natural Science at Munich University

1918 Writes first play '*Baal*'
Military service as a medical orderly

1920 Writes '*A Reckoning*', his first published thoughts on theatre

1924 Moves to Berlin

1928 First performance of '*The Threepenny Opera*'

1930 First performance of '*Rise and Fall of the City Of Mahagonny*'

1933 Brecht leaves Germany, travels through Vienna, Switzerland, France and settles in Denmark

1935 Visits New York

1939 Writes '*Mother Courage and her Children*'

1940 Moves to Finland, then the USA

1943 First performance of '*The Good Woman of Setzuan*'

1945 Writes '*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*'

1947 Appears before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) accused of being a communist

1948 Returns to Berlin

1949 Returns to Zurich and writes '*A Short Organum for the Theatre*', his most complete theatrical statement. Sets up his own company, the Berliner Ensemble

1950 Becomes a citizen of Austria

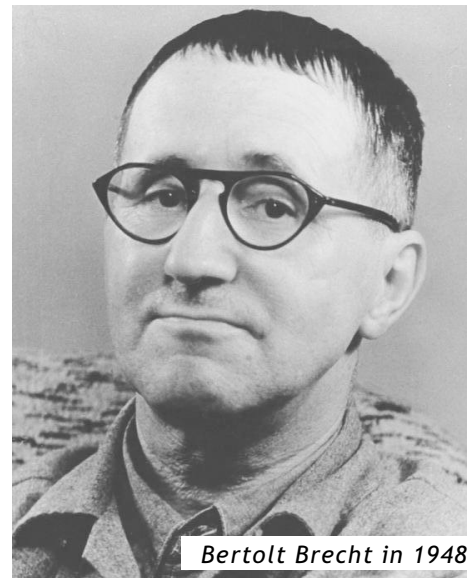
1952 Berliner Ensemble tours Poland

1954 First Night of '*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*'

1955 '*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*' at the Paris International Festival

1956 Dies of coronary thrombosis (heart attack)
Berliner Ensemble performs in London

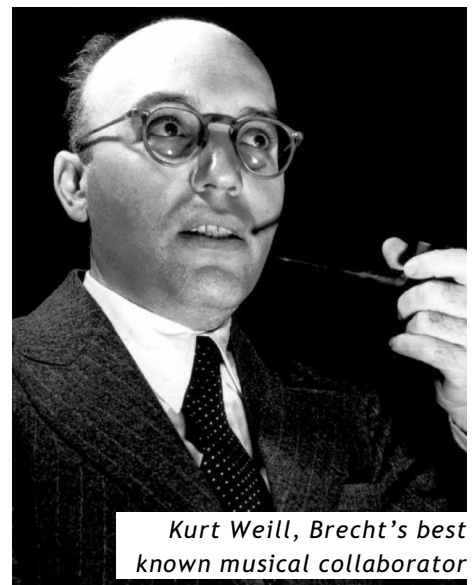
[SEE A GEOGRAPHICAL MAP OF BRECHT'S LIFE](#)



Bertolt Brecht in 1948

[HEAR 'MACK THE KNIFE' \(SUNG BY BRECHT\)](#)

[HEAR 'MACK THE KNIFE' \(SWING VERSION\)](#)



Kurt Weill, Brecht's best known musical collaborator

[SEE AN EXCERPT FROM BRECHT'S TESTIMONY TO HUAC](#)



Brecht and his wife Helene Weigel at their theatre in 1951

History of the Play

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Brecht was exiled from his home country of Germany, seeking refuge in Sweden. Adolf Hitler, the leader of the German Nazi party wanted to arrest Brecht because of his opposition to their politics. By 1940 Germany had captured much of Europe, so the whole continent became an unsafe place for Brecht to stay.

He moved to Finland, from where he wrote to the German actress Luise Rainer who was now an American citizen working in Hollywood. She signed a visa affidavit (a document of support) for Brecht that enabled him to enter the United States of America. He escaped Europe in 1941, the same year that Finland entered the war on the side of Germany.

In gratitude to Rainer, Brecht agreed to write *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for her to perform on Broadway. It was finished in 1945, but his relationship with Rainer became troubled and she never performed it.

Brecht based the play on two ancient stories, the Chinese *Hui-lan Ji* (Chalk Circle) and the biblical *Judgement of Solomon*. He also drew on a short story he had previously written called *The Augsburg Chalk Circle* and in his diaries cites Brueghel's painting *Dulle Griet* (Mad Meg) as inspirational.



SOURCES

Hui-lan Ji

Hui-lan Ji (Chalk Circle) is a Yuan Dynasty (1259-1368) Chinese classical verse play. A young girl, Hai-tang, bears a child as the second wife of a wealthy man. His first wife claims the child is her own. Hai-tang, the second wife, is judged the true mother when she refuses to pull the child apart in the test of the Chalk Circle.

The Judgement of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16-28)

Two prostitutes live in the same house and both bear a child. One baby dies in the night and its mother swaps him for the living baby. Both claim the child is their own. Solomon orders that the child be cut in two and half given to each mother. One prostitute gives up the child rather than see him harmed and is judged to be the true mother.



Brueghel's *Dulle Griet* (Mad Meg)

German (Brecht's original)	Literal translation	James and Tania Stern with W. H. Auden (1955)	Frank McGuinness (1997)
Ein guter Soldat ist mit Leib und Seele dabei.	A good soldier is in it with body and soul.	A good soldier has his heart and soul in it.	Yes, but a good soldier has to put his heart and soul in to it.
Für einen Vorgesetzten läßt er sich zerfetzen.	For a person of higher rank he lets himself be torn to pieces.	He lets himself be hacked to pieces by his superiors,	For the sake of top brass he'd let himself be blown to kingdom come,
Mit brechendem Aug sieht er noch, wie sein Gefreiter ihm anerkennend zunickt.	With breaking eyes he still just sees, his corporal nodding his approval.	and even while he's dying he's aware of his Corporal nodding approval.	and as he breathes his last he should see how his corporal nods his approval.
Das ist ihm Lohn genug, sonst will er nichts.	That is reward enough for him, he wants nothing else.	For him that's reward enough. That's all he wants.	That's his reward.
Aber dir wird nicht zugenickt, und verrecken mußst du doch	But you will get no nod, and you've got to die nonetheless.	But <i>you</i> won't get a nod. And you'll croak just the same.	But you'll get no such nod and you'll still croak it.
Kruzifix, wie soll ich mit so einem Untergebenen den Gouverneursbankert finden, das möchte ich wissen.	Christ, how am I supposed to find the Governor's bastard with such an underling beside me, that I would like to know.	Christ, how am I to lay my hands on the Governor's bastard with an ass like you!	Christ, how am I to find the Governor's brat with such a bag of shite beside me? That I'd like to know.

Translating Brecht

These translations are of the corporal's speech on page 44 of the Frank McGuinness text.

We selected the McGuinness version of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* because it is contemporary, concise and accessible. In an interview in 2007, McGuinness describes his approach to the adaptation -

I did a lot of work on it in 1997, streamlining the narrative, constantly refining it, and the payoff is that it is in robust shape today. There's nothing missing, nothing overwritten.

Cited in The Caucasian Chalk Circle Workpack, National Theatre (2007)

We compared the literal translation of Brecht's original with two others -

- Idioms - McGuinness uses many more well known phrases. Compare 'superiors' with 'top brass', and 'torn to pieces' with 'blown to kingdom come'.
- Linguistic register - McGuinness chooses language that is low on the linguistic register (ie - vulgar). Compare 'ass' with 'bag of shite'.
- Modern - McGuinness chooses language that is more commonly used in today's society. Compare 'bastard' with 'brat'.
- Lost meanings - Both Sterns and McGuinness lose the powerful image of 'breaking eyes' in Brecht's original.
- Added meanings - Sterns impose their own emphases with many full stops, italics and exclamation marks.
- Altered meanings - Compare Sterns 'by his superiors' to the 'for a person of higher rank' in Brecht's original.

Plot Synopsis

PROLOGUE

Caucasian Chalk Circle is, firstly, a play within a play, in itself an Epic Theatre technique. The framing Prologue and Epilogue are set in a valley in the Soviet Union, around the end of the Second World War and shows a dispute between two communities as to who should own and manage farmland in the valley after the Nazis have retreated from a village, leaving it abandoned. A parable of an old folk tale has been organised by one group, to demonstrate the idea that things should be given to those who take care of them. The famous Singer, Arkadi Tsheidze, arrives and relates the fable. As narrator, throughout *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* play-within-a-play he often relates the thoughts of characters and enhances scenes with stronger and more descriptive narration. He also tells us when the scene changes and where we are.

Scene One: The Noble Child

We see Governor Georgi Abashvili and his wife Natella ignoring a crowd of beggars and poverty stricken citizens on the way to Easter Mass. The Fat Prince sucks up to Natella and remarks how their new child Michael is "a governor from head to toe." The baby coughs, causing a heated argument between his two doctors. A despatch rider tries unsuccessfully to deliver his message from the Persian war but is ignored and the couple enter the church, leaving the peasants behind. The Singer conjures up a meeting between Grusha Vachnadze, a maid to the governor's wife enters and a soldier Simon Chachava, who reveals he has watched her bathe in the rivers. She storms off enraged.

The Singer continues the story in the palace, now a trap full of armed men. The Governor refuses to hear the despatch riders message and his architects express surprise that he is thinking of building . The Ironshirts, the Governor's guards, turn on him. The Fat Prince has orchestrated a coup and is now in control; the Governor is brought from his house in chains, and his doctors and servants quickly flee. In the confusion, Simon finds Grusha and begins to propose. She interrupts him to accept and he gives her his silver cross. Grusha accepts. Simon runs off to fulfill his duty to the Governor's wife, who is more concerned with selecting her travelling wardrobe than the fact her life is in danger. The east gate goes up in flames and she flees leaving her son, Michael, behind. A Stableman reports that the Governor has been beheaded and that anyone found with his son can expect no mercy. The Cook tells Grusha that fools like her are always left holding the baby. Grusha puts the baby down and runs to collect her things. When she comes back the Governor's head has been nailed to the church door, and a reward offered for the child. Grusha hesitates and then takes the boy with her to the mountains. The Singer explains what is going through her mind as she carries him away with her.

Scenes Two, Three and Four: Flight to the Northern Mountains

The Singer announces the scene and we see Grusha trying to escape to the mountains. She sings an old folk song about incompetent generals. An old man in a peasants cottage over-charges her for milk for the baby. She tries to pass herself off as a noblewoman at a caravansary but her work-worn hands give her away and she is thrown out. A class-conscious servant offers her food but she goes on her way. The Singer and Musicians wonder if she can elude the Ironshirts, who appear on stage, a sadistic Corporal telling a junior that he cannot be a real soldier as he does not enjoy violence. Grusha deposits the baby on the doorstep of a peasant woman, who decides she will keep him despite her husband's protests. The Singer describes Grusha's mixed emotions about this as she walks away, only to encounter the perverted Corporal and Ironshirts who are looking for the child. She turns and runs, warning the peasant woman to take off the child's fine linen and pretend he is her own. In spite of Grusha's pleas the woman denies all knowledge of the child when faced with the Ironshirts and Grusha is forced to knock the Corporal out with a log and flee to protect the baby. She changes him into rags and confesses in a poetic soliloquy that she has taken care of the child for too long to be able to part with him. Continuing on her way she comes to a dangerous bridge over a ravine. Despite being told the bridge will break, she crosses telling the child they must live together or die together. Once on the other side she laughs at the stranded Ironshirts and sings the child a ballad about the Disinherited.

After seven days and nights of walking, Grusha wearily retreats to her brother's mountain farm. Lavrenti, Grusha's brother, turns out to be hen-pecked and his wife pious and un-friendly. Grusha becomes ill and lives in her brother's house for the winter. Rumours spread in the village, and Lavrenti convinces Grusha to marry a dying peasant, Jessup, in order to quell them and legitimise Michael. She reluctantly agrees. A comic wedding ensues. Guests arrive at the wedding-funeral, including the Singer and musicians, which act as the hired musicians for the event, and gossip endlessly. It is revealed that the Grand Duke is overthrowing the princes and the civil war has finally ended, and no one can be drafted anymore. At this, the supposedly-dead villager Jessup returns to "life", and it becomes clear he was only

"ill" when the possibility of being drafted was present. Grusha realises she has a husband.

For months, Grusha's new husband tries to make her a 'real wife', but she refuses. Years pass, and Simon finds Grusha while washing clothes in the river. They have a sweet exchange before Simon jokingly asks if she has found another man. Grusha tells him cryptically that nothing has changed but she has changed her name. The Singer fills in what she thought but did not say - that she has not the heart to leave a helpless child. Then Simon spots Michael. The following scene between the two is told predominantly by the Singer, who speaks for each of the two character's thoughts, and is easily the most heartbreaking part of the play. However, Ironshirts arrive carrying Michael in, and ask Grusha if she is his mother, she says that she is, and Simon leaves distraught. The Governor's Wife wants the child back and Grusha must go to court back in Nukha. The Singer ends the act with questions about Grusha's future, and reveals that there is another story we must learn: the story of Azdak.

Scene Five: The Story of the Judge

The Singer returns to the day the Grand Duke was overthrown and the Governor beheaded. On that day Azdak, a village clerk and notorious drinker and poacher, shelters a "peasant" and protects him from authorities by a demonstration of convoluted logic. He later realizes from the man's white hands that he is sheltering a member of the aristocracy - in fact the Grand Duke himself. The man tries to bribe him but Azdak cannot bring himself to hand the Duke over, even when Shauva, a policeman arrives.

By the next scene Azdak has realised he inadvertently harboured the Grand Duke; since he thinks the rebellion is an uprising against the government itself, he turns himself in for his "class treason." But the rebellion isn't a populist one - in fact, the princes are trying to suppress a populist rebellion occurring as a result of their own - and Azdak renounces his revolutionary ideas to keep the Ironshirts from killing him as a radical. The Fat Prince enters, looking to secure the Ironshirts' support in making his nephew a new judge. Azdak suggests they hold a mock trial to test him; the Fat Prince agrees. Azdak plays the accused in the trial - the Grand Duke. He makes several very successful jabs against the Princes' corruption, and amuses the Ironshirts enough that they appoint him instead of the Fat Prince's nephew: "The judge was always a chancer; now let a chancer be the judge!"

The Singer tells us that Azdak remained Judge during two years of civil war himself on the bench. He uses a large law book as a pillow to sit on. What follows is a series of short scenes, interspersed by the "song" of the Singer, in which he judges in favor of the poor, the oppressed, and good-hearted bandits; in one set of cases in which all the plaintiffs and the accused are corrupt, he passes a completely nonsensical set of judgments. But it doesn't last forever; the Grand Duke returns to power, the Fat Prince is beheaded, and Azdak decides to turn himself in and beg for mercy. When Natella, the Governor's wife, returns he abjectly promises to restore Michael to the Governor's Wife, behead Grusha, and do whatever else the Governor's Wife wants: "It will all be arranged as you order, your Excellency. As you order."

Scene Six: The Chalk Circle

We meet Grusha in court, supported by the former Cook of the Governor and Simon Chachava, who will swear he is the father of the boy. Natella Abashvili comes in with two lawyers, who each reassure her things will be taken care of. Azdak is brought in in chains and beaten by Ironshirts, who are told he is an enemy of the state. A rider comes in with a proclamation, stating the Grand Duke has reappointed Azdak as judge. Azdak is cleaned up and resumes his duties as judge. The trials, however, do not begin with Grusha and the Grand Duke's wife, but with a very elderly married couple who wish to divorce. Azdak is unable to make a decision on this case, so he sets it aside to hear the next case on the docket. The prosecution comes forth and liberally bribes Azdak in hopes of swinging the verdict. It is revealed that Natella only wants the child because all the estates and finances of the Governor are tied to her heir and cannot be accessed without him. Azdak interrupts and asks what Grusha has to say, which is only that the child is hers. When pressed she says she has taught him, fed him, spared no expense and taught him to work. When Azdak tries to cut the proceedings short, Grusha accuses him of corruption and ignorance of the law. Azdak fines her for this but, after consideration, claims he can't find the true mother. He asks Grusha if she would not prefer for Michael to be rich; she does not reply, but the Singer tells us her thoughts on the ability of wealth to corrupt. Azdak decides that he will have to devise a test. A circle of chalk is drawn, and Michael is placed in the center. The true mother, Azdak states, will be able to pull the child from the center. If they both pull, they will tear the child in half and get half each. The test begins but (akin to the Judgement of Solomon) Grusha refuses to pull as she cannot bear to hurt Michael. Azdak gives her one more chance, but again she cannot pull Michael. During this dilemma, a poignant song is sung by the Singer as a reflection of Grusha's thoughts toward Michael. The others onstage cannot hear this, but they feel the overwhelming emotion through Grusha. Azdak declares that Grusha is the true mother, as she loves Michael too much to be able to hurt him. The Governor's wife is told that the estates shall fall to the city and be made into a garden for children called "Azdak's Garden". Simon pays Azdak his fine. Azdak tells the old couple he shall divorce them, but "accidentally" divorces Grusha and the peasant man, leaving her free to marry Simon. Everyone dances off happily as Azdak disappears. The Singer remarks upon Azdak's wisdom and notes that in the ending, everyone got what they deserved.

Artistic Brief

The title of the play draws a parallel between the geographical region of the Caucasus and the Caucasian ethnic group that comprises the people of Europe. It poses the question -

Who has the greater claim to ownership, the one that creates something or the one that cares for it?

Our production retains the original setting of Georgia in its brief period of independence from 1918-1921, following the Russian revolution of 1917, and is inspired by the simple, agrarian nature of the country at that time.

The instigating action is Grusha's choice to rescue or abandon Michael, and I want the idea of contradiction (or choice) to feature in every aspect of the play -

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ■ Good vs Bad - | characters that mirror one another are played by the same actor. |
| ■ Europe vs Asia - | Georgia is situated on the cusp of two continents. |
| ■ Individual vs Establishment - | Grusha is alone in her struggle against the revolutionaries. |
| ■ Hot vs Cold - | south Georgia is sub-tropical, the north is mountainous and snowy. |

Set Design and Lighting

A set that is representative rather than realistic. The wall is a symbol of division and authority and can be moved around to create the different scenes. A circle of light is created as a symbol of protection and continuity. One side of the wall is rough and dilapidated, the other is warm and homely. Chairs, benches and a table can be used as themselves, or as building blocks to represent other objects. There is an onstage changing area stage right.

Costume and Acting

The costume design shows Simon Chachava on the left and the Corporal on the right. The characters represent opposite attitudes towards duty. The former shows a selfless commitment, the latter an opportunism. To highlight this choice, the characters are played by the same actor, but the costume is worn differently. A mask is added and the Corporal is acted more grotesquely to draw attention to his inhumanity.

Music

We took as inspiration the speech singing of Lotte Lenya in '[Pirate Jenny](#)', the traditional country music backing of Tom Jones, '[Did Trouble Me](#)', Rebekah Findlay's modern version of traditional song '[Scarborough Fair](#)', and [Yves Lambert and the Bebert Orchestra](#) who play a crossover of folk and funk.



Set Design by Victoria Spearing



Costume Design by Fiona Davis

Brecht in Theory and Rehearsal

Brecht is over-theorised, even in his own opinion -

My theories are altogether far more naïve than one might think - more naïve than my way of expressing them might allow one to suspect.¹

His theories create an interesting working method for theatre, but as Martin Esslin (a prominent theatre scholar) notes-

Basically these principles are neither very complicated nor very new²

Therefore, there is no need to be mystified by the magnitude of Brecht's ideas. Let us look at them simply.

~

Epic Theatre

Takes its name from the epic poetry of the ancient Greeks. The Greek words *epikos* and *epos* mean 'word, story, poem'. An epic poem is one that tells a story through narration. Epic theatre that uses a narrator differs from theatre that only uses characters to tell a story.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle suggested that being emotionally involved with the characters in a story leads the audience to a point of release when that story reaches its climax -

Other names for Epic Theatre

Non-Aristotlean drama
Narrative theatre
Dialectical theatre
Brechtian theatre

Tragedy, therefore, is an imitation of a worthy or illustrious and perfect action ... by men acting, and not through narration, through pity and fear effecting a purification from such like passions³

Hollywood is a great user of this idea, presenting a story that gives us an emotional experience and makes us feel better about the world.

Brecht wanted to create a theatre contrary to Aristotle's. He didn't want the audience to be carried away in an emotional experience. He wanted to make the audience think, rather than feel. He wanted the audience to leave the theatre fired up with ideas, rather than relaxed by emotions. He wrote -

The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason.⁴

He wanted his audience to question the play, not to take it for granted, so they realised that they have the power to change the world. He compared how traditional and epic theatre audiences react -

¹Cited in Martin Esslin, 'Brecht: A Choice of Evils', (Heinemann, London, 1959), 106.

²Martin Esslin, 'Brecht: A Choice of Evils', (Heinemann, London, 1959), 106.

³Aristotle, 'The Poetics', (Prometheus Books, New York, 1992), 10-11.

⁴Bertolt Brecht, 'The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 23.

The dramatic theatre's spectator says:

*Yes, I have felt like that too -
Just like me -
It's only natural -
It'll never change -
The sufferings of this man appal me,
because they are inescapable -
That's great art; it all seems the most obvious
thing in the world -
I weep when they weep, I laugh when they
laugh.*

The epic theatre's spectator says:

*I'd never have thought it -
That's not the way -
That's extraordinary, hardly believable -
It's got to stop -
The sufferings of this man appal me, because
they are unnecessary -
That's great art: nothing obvious in it -
I laugh when they weep, I weep when they
laugh.⁵*

Brecht's leading actress, Helene Weigel, sums up the aim of Epic Theatre -

People are intelligent and, looking at plays who [sic] are intelligent, they understand them; and understand too, that it's not destiny, deity or kings who have the absolute power to change their life.⁶

[SEE THE VIDEO OF HELENE WEIGEL](#)

How did Brecht stop his audiences from getting emotionally involved, and start them thinking?

~

Verfremdungseffekt

Verfremdungseffekt is the act of stopping an audience becoming emotionally involved in on-stage action. Martin Esslin -

*the audience must be discouraged from losing its critical detachment ...
the producer must strive to produce by all means at his disposal effects
which will keep the audience separate, estranged, alienated from the
action⁷*

Other names for Verfremdungseffekt

V-Effekt
Alienation
A-Effect
Defamiliarisation
Distancing Effect

Here is a list of means that Brecht used to create the verfremdungseffekt, and some of his comments on them -

- Using a narrator - stands outside the action, talks directly to the audience, comments in an unemotional way.
- Direct address - actors come out of character and talk directly to the audience. Also known as 'breaking the fourth wall'.
- Dramatic irony - giving the audience information that the characters do not possess destroys the suspense of the story.
- Signs / Projection - tells the audience what will happen, so shifts the focus to how it happens. Example - 'A short song allows Miss Polly Peachum to confess to her Horrified Parents that she is wedded to the Murderer Macheath'⁸

⁵Bertolt Brecht, 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 71.

⁶Helene Weigel, cited in 'Brecht on Stage', (BBC / Open University, 1989).

⁷Cited in Martin Esslin, 'Brecht: A Choice of Evils', (Heinemann, London, 1959), 110-111.

⁸Bertolt Brecht, 'On the use of Music in an Epic Theatre', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 85.

- Mechanics of theatre - making the means of production visible reminds the audience that they are in a theatre. Examples - showing lights, sound equipment, costume changes. *'It is one of the means of preventing an unwanted element of illusion'*⁹
- Episodic - the plot does not build to a climax, it is a montage of scenes that are complete in themselves.
- Music - interrupts the flow of the action and comments on it.¹⁰
- Masks - *'classical and medieval theatre alienated its characters by making them wear human or animal masks'*¹¹
- Acting - *'everything to do with the emotions has to be externalized ... it must be developed in to a gesture ... some action that gives away what is going on inside him'*¹²

In Rehearsal

Brecht didn't discuss his theories when rehearsing. Angelika Hurwicz, the first actress to play the character Grusha, has said that over months of rehearsal Brecht only mentioned *Verfremdungseffekt* once.¹³

In reality, Brecht was a practical rather than a theoretical director. His directing assistant, now a Professor at Stanford University, Carl Weber explains -

If an actor asked Brecht ... what do you think, how should I do this? I have an idea. He says 'Well show me, don't tell me'

[SEE THE VIDEO OF CARL WEBER](#)

His rehearsals were democratic, encouraging input from everyone in the rehearsal room. Hans Mayer, a professor of literature who worked with Brecht confirms -

Brecht always discussed ... he wanted to have a collective responsibility

[SEE THE VIDEO OF HANS MAYER](#)

Brecht was aware that his theories could slow down a performance, and was concerned that the practice of his theatre remained quick and vital. One of his final rehearsal notes reads -

*there is in England a long standing fear that German art ... must be terribly heavy, slow, labourious and pedestrian. So our playing needs to be quick, light, strong. This is not a question of hurry, but of speed, not simply of quick playing, but of quick thinking. We must keep the tempo of a run-through and infect it with quiet strength, with our own fun ... The audience has to see that here are a number of artists working together as a collective (ensemble) in order to convey stories, ideas, virtuoso feats to the spectator by common effort.*¹⁴

⁹Bertolt Brecht, 'Making Visible the Sources of Light', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 141.

¹⁰See 'On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 85.

¹¹Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 192.

¹²Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting', in 'Brecht on Theatre', (ed. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964), 139.

¹³Cited in Margaret Eddershaw, 'Performing Brecht', (Routledge, London, 1996), 37.

¹⁴Cited in Margaret Eddershaw, 'Performing Brecht', (Routledge, London, 1996), 39.

Post Show Notes

Acting (characters, relationships, vocal delivery, physical traits, use of space, etc.)

Music (instruments, moods, styles, etc.)

Set and props (time period, location, moods, etc.)

Costume (time period, status, masks, materials, etc.)

What is the play about?

The bit that worked the best for you, and why

A bit that didn't work for you, and why

How would you have done that bit differently?

Discussion Topics

Before the show

- 1) As a class, examine some examples of parables and the different ways they are packaged (text, poem, play). Include as examples both the Chinese *Circle of Chalk* and the *Judgment of Solomon* from the Old Testament, 1Kings 3:16-28 (these can be found in the History of the Play section).
 - Do both pieces have the same moral?
 - What other conclusions might be drawn from these parables?
- 2) Arguably, Brecht wanted his theatre to be 'Political' -
 - What do you think this may mean in a modern context?
 - Is producing a play like Caucasian Chalk Circle still politically relevant?
 - What arguments can be made for and against political and social relevance?
- 3) Blackeyed Theatre are well known for their use of music in theatre productions.
 - Why do you think they may have selected a Brecht play for their tour? Think of artistic and commercial motivations.
- 4) To what extent could you class a style of British Theatre, such as Pantomime, as Brechtian?

After the show

- 1) As a group, discuss the set created by Victoria Spearing and Blackeyed Theatre for this production of Caucasian Chalk Circle (refer to the picture included in this education pack to jog your memory!).
 - How many different ways can you remember the set being used?
 - Why do you think the company has chosen to use this style of set, rather than a fixed set, or back cloths?
 - What Brechtian effects or choices have been made based on this style of set?
- 2) Consider the character of Azdak.
 - In our production, he is played by a woman BUT is still a definitely Male Character (an example of *verfremdungseffekt*). What effect does this directorial decision have on our perception of the character and their behaviour?
 - Tom Neill, the director, says Azdak is a character with 'ambivalence'. What does he mean by this and how does he show it in this production?
 - If a Judge is corrupt but his outcomes are justified and perceived as 'fair' does this make him a good judge?
- 3) In our production the characters of Grusha and Natella are played by the same actress, Anna Glynn.
 - What effect does this have on their characters as viewed by an audience?
 - How did the actress differentiate between the two women?
- 4) As a director, Tom Neill has chosen to focus on 'Contradictions (or choice)' as one of the strongest themes in the play.
 - How is this theme presented within this production?
 - What directorial decisions were made to emphasise this?
- 5) If you discussed political relevance as part of your pre-show preparation, return to the question. Having seen Blackeyed Theatre's production, do you feel that arguments for and against may have changed? Why?

Further Activities

- 1) Using costume shorthand or masks, stage a short version of a parable in which each performer is required to play TWO parts. Encourage your students to think about their physicality to reflect character 'type' and clearly delineate which character they are playing. Discuss as a group how successful their portrayal is in Brechtian terms.

PART TWO: Ask students to research 'Gestus' - what do they think Brecht means by this term? Discuss as a group and apply gestus to the portrayal of a familiar character.

- 2) Look at Simon Armitage's sonnet '**Poem**' from the Faber and Faber collection 'Selected Poems', which begins 'And if it snowed and snow covered the drive'. The character discussed in this poem is an ordinary man - sometimes 'good' and sometimes 'bad'. In two groups devise pieces which emphasise the strengths OR the weaknesses in the man's character. How would he appear in a Brechtian play like **Caucasian Chalk Circle**?
- 3) Write an alternative prologue to 'frame' the parable in **Caucasian Chalk Circle**. Think about historical settings, and modern settings, to which this moral can be applied. Once you have settled on a context think about costume and music; would the style Blackeyed have employed still be appropriate? If not, choose an alternative style and give your reasons for selecting this.
- 4) Write a review of Blackeyed's **Caucasian Chalk Circle**, with emphasis on identifying Brechtian stylistic content and discussing how successful you feel the production was in embodying this style. (Send it to us at education@southhillpark.org.uk !)

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