

Nottingham Playhouse, Shared Experience
& West Yorkshire Playhouse present

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

By Bertolt Brecht
In a new translation by Alistair Beaton

EDUCATION PACK

Compiled by Aisling Zambon

**Nottingham
Playhouse**

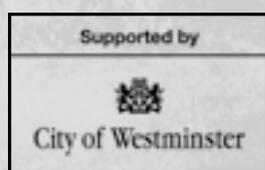


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COMPANY CREDO

At the heart of our work is the POWER and EXCITEMENT of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience - a SHARED EXPERIENCE. We are committed to creating theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

THE PACK

This education pack has been produced collaboratively by Nottingham Playhouse, Shared Experience and West Yorkshire Playhouse. It is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Included in this pack is background material on the play, informative articles, interviews with the cast and creative team and details of our creative processes.

I hope that it is used as a resource to give insight to some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. There are questions and exercises throughout to stimulate and provoke both discussion and practical work of your own.

Aisling Zambon



Jed Aukin, Nick Asbury, Clare Perkins and James Clyde

BRECHT IN PRACTICE

SHARED EXPERIENCE'S APPROACH TO

The Caucasian Chalk Circle



Chris Pattison and Jed Aukin

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is in some ways a very natural choice for a Shared Experience production, concerned with a woman's epic journey of love and risk. Grusha makes choices against the social norms of her society, and in this sense Grusha is not unlike the protagonists from some of our previous plays. However, some of Brecht's theories could appear to be inconsistent with Shared Experience's rehearsal process, but director Nancy Meckler has not felt restricted by this, but rather, excited to direct a play with such a rich story and characters. So much of theatre has been influenced by Brecht's methods that they are inherent in the commonly used theatre techniques we and other companies use, and are no longer necessarily conspicuous as 'Brechtian'.

Theoretical differences between Shared Experience & Brecht

In his book, *'Directors in Perspective- Bertolt Brecht- Chaos According to Plan'*, John Fuegi wrote: *'The key test always was: does it work on stage? If not, throw it out. If it does work, and if it conflicts with Theory, throw away Theory.'*

Brecht in theory, focused on instigating objectivity in his audience; not wanting them to become emotionally overwhelmed by the story or experience emotions at the same time as the characters. The purpose of this is to enable them to make judgements and to analyse the story and behaviour of the characters presented to them, encouraging his audience to take action.

Nancy Meckler describes the union between the two approaches:

'IN THEIR WORK, SHARED EXPERIENCE WANT THE AUDIENCE TO FEEL DEEPLY ENGAGED WITH THE PERFORMERS AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE PIECE THEY ARE IN. ONCE A REAL SENSE OF ENSEMBLE IS CREATED, THE ACTORS ARE ABLE TO GET INVOLVED WITH WHAT THE PIECE IS SAYING TO AN AUDIENCE. THEY WANT TO SERVE THE PLAY, RATHER THAN JUST GET THEMSELVES NOTICED. IN THIS SENSE, SHARED EXPERIENCE ACTORS ARE BEING BRECHTIAN. BRECHT'S OWN ACTORS WERE FULLY TRAINED IN STANISLAVSKI TECHNIQUES. THEY WOULD AUTOMATICALLY FEEL DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHARACTERS' FEELINGS. BRECHT'S EFFORTS TO USE HIS ALIENATION TECHNIQUES IN REHEARSAL DID NOT MEAN THEY WERE THROWING AWAY THEIR TRAINING. BY THE SAME TOKEN, WHEN WE USED SHARED EXPERIENCE EXERCISES TO GET UNDER THE SKIN OF THE CHARACTERS, TO EXPLORE THEIR INNER HIDDEN LIVES IN A PHYSICAL WAY, WE ARE NOT NECESSARILY IN CONFLICT WITH BRECHT'S FINAL AIMS.'

It is interesting to compare the bigger intentions behind Shared Experience and Brecht's work: Brecht's priority was to change society and he was candid about his Communist political agenda, Shared Experience does not have a dictatorial approach to theatre, nor a specific political view point. Our ambitions are more intimate; focusing on the relationship between the actors and audience. Brecht saw theatre as a revelatory tool; showing the workings of society. Our emphasis is different, but not unrelated. Shared Experience believe there is a desire to see expressed in Theatre that which we conceal in life; we sometimes do this by having a characters feelings literally expressed on stage, and very often explore exercises in rehearsals to look inside a character. Ultimately, the aim is to reveal truths about our human existence, our priority being to connect with our audience, which may be transforming for both the actors and audience and through this, we may embrace political ideas or even challenge (the) them.

Brecht wanted to challenge his audience and make them think, at Shared Experience we want our audience to both think and feel, and later accounts of Brecht's work suggest that although he wanted to move away from the *'hot acting'* and melodrama of his predecessors, he too wanted his audience to be genuinely engaged on all levels: 'If the critics could only look at my theatre as the audience does, without starting out by stressing my theories, then they might well simply see theatre – a theatre, I hope, imbued with imagination, humour and meaning' (Brecht on Theatre – the Development of an Aesthetic, edited and translated by John Willet).

Shared Experience, Brecht & Stanislavski

Although once considered the antithesis of each other, Brecht and Stanislavski methods are now imbedded in our theatre making. A modern audience is familiar with the types of theatre pioneered by them, even if without knowledge of them as practitioners. Many of Shared Experience's acting and performance techniques inadvertently stem from both Brecht and Stanislavski).

Brecht, like Stanislavski was interested in the contradictions within characters. For Brecht, this was through the principle that people, therefore society, can transform; change is possible. Treating a character as a real person generates a more truthful performance. During the Shared Experience rehearsal process, Nancy works with the actor to explore their character's contradictions; working in such detail sometimes means that by the time of the performance 'some contradictions could be virtually invisible to the spectator'. Brecht used his alienation effect techniques ('*verfremdung*') to develop depth to scenes and characters: John Fuegi from his discussions with Angelika Hurwicz (a famous actor who played Grusche in Brecht's 1954 production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*), understood: '...*Verfremdung* was useful to an actor on that actor's way to fully understanding the manner in which a scene might be played, the device itself would no longer be visible by the time of the premier.' (*Directors in Perspective- Bertolt Brecht- Chaos According to Plan*, by John Fuegi).

The character of Natella Abashvili, the Governors Wife, could be presented as a stereotype, but Nancy is keen to find depth in this character, whilst retaining the comedy. Nancy and Josephine (the actor playing Natella) explore the reasons behind the Governesses behaviour and see that she is; *'scared, rather than evil. The character's behaviour comes from reality, even if it is simplistic, it's also funny.'* Nancy describes the style of the story: *'It's written like a fairy tale, which has a very dark underbelly, like most fairy tales, look at Cinderella; the ugly sisters, although caricatured, are based on reality.'* Nancy goes on to say: *'The character of the Sergeant could be seen as pantomime, but you want to find the layers, because Brecht was using this character to express the horrors of war.'*

The ensemble & rehearsal process

At the heart of our work is the power and energy of the performer's physical presence. Our rehearsals are physically and emotionally vigorous. The company work as an ensemble, bonded through games and exercises; working closely with Liz Ranken, a movement director, early on in rehearsals. Nancy puts equal emphasis on analysing text and delving into the heart of the piece in a visceral way: 'We analyse text and do physical exercises to express emotion, so that the work is particularly engaging and energetic. It's not explaining emotion, it's getting to whatever's happening inside the character.'

Brecht too wanted his actors to be physically engaged, so that whatever their characters were feeling would be expressed through the actor's body. Angelika Hurwicz summarised that which is 'learnable from Brecht's style': 'Even thoughts, even subtle internal developments should be depicted through the gestures and bearing of the actors.' (*Directors in Perspective - Bertolt Brecht - Chaos According to Plan*, by John Fuegi)

Nancy sees Shared Experience's rehearsal room as: 'a genuinely open forum. A lot of actors who work with us say it's unique. It's about you bring to the production, you are a part of it. Today (in rehearsals), some actors had different ideas about the play than me. I want to listen and explore these, as I may gain a better understanding (of the play).'

Although Nancy had a strong visual idea of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* before rehearsals began, (as the play was in its final draft and the set had been designed), she had not decided on the staging or made decisions about how each character should be played. Describing the early rehearsal period, she says:

'It's about opening up to exploration. In the first two weeks of rehearsals we've done ensemble games, physical work in the mornings, then text in the afternoon; discussing what each character's main 'want' is. Then we did improvisations, which were sometimes a modern equivalent to the scene, so that the actors got a chance to actually experience and explore that 'want'. This helped me to see whether the actor has got in touch with what drives the character; their 'wants' and 'obstacles', so they can experience it. It is the obstacles that make the characters more interesting and less two dimensional.'

Shared Experience approach rehearsals with the company as an ensemble; all working together towards the best creative choices. Brecht, too, was an advocate of the ensemble theoretically, saying: 'Individual playing only reaches full effectiveness by means of ensemble playing.' However, it is reported that in reality his companies did not work as ensembles. Angelika Hurwicz is quoted as saying: 'Brecht loved stars.' After he returned from exile, the majority of Brecht's plays were vehicles for star actors.

Directing *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Nancy Meckler has not focused on theoretical differences between Shared Experience's and Brecht's style, but on story-telling, approaching the text as she would any other play: 'A lot of the ways we work now are Brechtian. Shared Experience working in a different style than we normally do is not necessary to convey Brecht's play.'

Discussions points

The production overall:

- What were your expectations of the play before you saw it and how did you feel at the end of the play?
- What image from the production has stayed in your mind and why?
- What line from the play has stayed in your mind and why?



James Clyde

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Physicalising an emotion

In groups of six, choose three characters from a particular scene in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Identify each character's feeling (the predominant, or a dominant one within the scene), for example do they feel anger? Fear? Love? Three of the six actors should be cast as the characters, with the other three playing their feelings. What sounds and physical shapes demonstrate these feelings? Don't be afraid to be quite abstract.

The three characters all have a simple set task to complete, for example, packing and un-packing suitcases. They are aware that these physicalised emotions are following them and trying to interrupt their task; yet they must try to carry on with their set task.

- How hard is it to ignore or repress strong emotions within you?
- Do the characters in the play manage to suppress their feelings?

Group story-telling

- In groups of about 5, sit in a circle. Each person in turn creates a sentence of a story. The sentences must follow and make some sense – no matter how fantastical! To begin with, give your story a title, for example: *'The Deep Dark Wood'*, or *'Adventures in the New World!'* Once you have created the story, act it out exactly as it was told, creating the scenes and images within the story.

Circle of Power

- The group stand in a circle
- One person stands in the centre and embodies an object, living thing or concept. They make the statement: *'I am more powerful than you because I am...'* For example *'...I am a wasp'*, or *'...I am a knife'*, or *'...I am electricity'*
- Someone else enters the circle and challenges their position of power by stating they are something else more powerful. If the first person in the circle is convinced they step back into the circle and the challenges continue.
- If the 2 people in the circle do have consensus on who/what is more powerful and therefore who should step back into the circle, the whole group should reach consensus or take a vote.
- And so the game continues, until it reaches its conclusion; a power that can't be challenged. There may be group consensus on this or the game may highlight the various perspectives in the group and is an opportunity to discuss differing view points.
- Try this game choosing characters or themes relating to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. For example *'I am more powerful than you because I am love'*.

'What do you see when you look at me?'

The aim of this exercise is to help the actors get into their character and develop relationships. It is useful to identify the sub-textual, inner connection between two characters, particularly lovers. The exercise brings out the impact of the physical presence of two people; reading each other through the eyes, body language and instinct.

The actors playing Simon and Grusha stand opposite each other, close together. The actors ask *'What do you see when you look at me?'* and the characters respond with what they truly see; it is honest, they should say what their characters would never say in the context of the play. They can describe what they see physically, emotionally and intuitively.

Then, in the context of their first meeting, they ask each other; *'What do you think I see when I look at you?'* They take turns to respond to each other, using single words or sentences to describe how they think the other sees them.

EXPRESSIONISM

AT SHARED EXPERIENCE

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. We believe there is a longing to see expressed in Theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone. Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private world. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when they allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table.

Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place. This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house felt like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale

INTERVIEW WITH NANCY MECKLER DIRECTOR

What inspired you to choose *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and what is your vision for this production?

I first saw *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* when I was 20 and it was such an overwhelming experience, that it has always been in my mind to have a go at putting it onstage. Several years ago I directed *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dream Coat* at Leicester. I really enjoyed working with children's choirs onstage in the production. When I was reading *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for Shared Experience, I suddenly realised it was a perfect piece for having a chorus and that we might recruit two choirs in each city we perform in.

Next I contacted the composer Ilona Sekacz who I knew to have an involvement with choirs. She immediately agreed that this would be a great opportunity to expand the music in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and that having choruses onstage would give the piece an added dimension. Everything will feel larger and heightened and more epic by their presence.

It will feel like a whole community is putting on the piece for our audience and I find it exciting that it is the actual community we are performing in.

How do you plan to approach the rehearsal process?

Part of our rehearsal process is about creating an ensemble. Often the actors are strangers to each other on the first day. We use games and exercises and physical work to build up a sense of them feeling organically connected to each other. In this production we will start off with an emphasis on the music as there is so much to learn, and the earlier they learn the music, the more comfortable they will be about concentrating on the text.

When directing a play do you ever feel scared about how it will turn out?

Well... an excited fear. Polly and I are committed to choosing projects that are frightening and challenging at the same time. We decided that we'd only do plays that frighten us.

Do you think there will be contradictions or challenges directing Brechts' play using Shared Experiences' process and style?

Although at first glance Brecht's alienation theory might seem contrary to the way we work, the more I read about Brecht and the way his actual rehearsals played out, the more I see him as a writer who did want to engage his audience in a deep way. But he also wanted to challenge them and make them think about what they were seeing in terms of changing their own lives or the way they think about their situation in life

Many of Brecht's techniques of alienation, such as one character singing another's thoughts to us, are now so much a part of theatre as we know it. His influence has been enormous and so it is hard to see his theories of practice as being very different from theatre we see around us all the time.



Nancy Meckler

INTERVIEW WITH **ALISTAIR BEATON** TRANSLATOR

How did you first approach translating *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*?

Every translation requires both respect for the original and a desire to render the play accessible and comprehensible to a modern audience. Naturally, there are tensions between those two needs. There is no perfect solution. Too much respect becomes reverence; too little respect turns the play into an exercise in self-promotion. I hope I have avoided both dangers.

What have been your priorities in translating this piece?

My main priority has been to maintain the vigour of the language and the general robust energy of the piece. It's a big play dealing with big subjects and has the most extraordinary sweep, taking us from tenderness through to vulgarity and back again. I have also tried to maintain the wit and humour of the play - an aspect of Brecht that is often neglected.

How have you collaborated with Nancy?

Closely. We went through my first draft in great detail, her eyes and ears detecting the occasional false note or lack of clarity. I think every writer - and translator - benefits from an outside view like this. Of course, we share a passion for this great play, which means we have been able to argue and debate without rancour. That's what good creative collaboration means.

Can you explain when and where the play is set?

What a good question. It's nominally set in the Caucasus, in Georgia, to be precise. But neither time nor place is of the essence in this play. Brecht himself is quite relaxed about period - he gives the soldiers spears and swords but one character talks of hearing gunfire in the town. Essentially, Brecht uses a time of civil war and social breakdown to illustrate his important themes, and that's what interests him more than the details of the setting.

What are the fundamental questions this play asks?

It makes us address big questions about ownership: who owns what and who deserves to own what. It also asks searching questions about the nature of justice and the law.

How have you reflected the contemporary political landscape in this translation?

I didn't need to. This play retains the most astonishing relevance to the major issues of today.

BERTOLT BRECHT

1898 - 1956

Brecht was born in 1898 in Augsburg to a Catholic father and Protestant mother of relatively comfortable means. He began publishing poetry at the age of 16, and on completing school in 1917 went to Munich University to study medicine. He briefly served as an orderly in a military hospital in Augsburg, starting work the month before the war ended and although he did not experience the horrors of war first-hand the effects of warfare would have been very clear to him.

In 1918 he wrote his first full play, *Baal*, and he soon became involved in the art scenes of Munich and then Berlin, almost always working in collaborative partnerships or collectives. He became a Marxist in the mid-1920s, and so he remained for the rest of his life; he later wrote, '*When I read Marx's Capital, I understood my plays.*' His prominence as a leading Weimar cultural figure and Communist made him a target of the rising Nazi movement, and in the years before they came to power, performances of his plays were frequently disrupted by Nazis.

He left Germany in 1933 (the day after the Reichstag Fire) and lived in Denmark, then Sweden, then Finland as war broke out and more and more countries fell to the Nazis. Finally, in 1941, he left (via the Soviet Union) for the United States.

The first draft of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was written in Los Angeles in 1943. Brecht had already written, three years previously, a short story called *The Augsburg Chalk Circle* which was set in his hometown during the Thirty Years War. Brecht redrafted *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1944 after being told by Lion Feuchtwanger that the character of Grusha was '*too pure and simple*' and therefore impossible to sympathise with; he introduced, among other things, the scenes where Grusha poses as a noblewoman. The finished play premiered in 1948 as a student production at Carleton College, Minnesota, but it was not produced in Germany until a 1954 production by the Berliner Ensemble.

The tide of anti-Communist sentiment in the US after the Second World War resulted in an investigation into suspected Communists in Hollywood by the House of Un-American Activities Committee. Many such people refused, and Brecht was initially among them, but, eager to leave for Europe and to ensure that the authorities would not restrain him, he changed his mind. On 30 October 1947, Brecht testified that, among other things, he had never been a member of any Communist Party. (Despite his obvious Communist sympathies, this was apparently true.)

He was not obsequious to the Committee (he smoked a cigar throughout his testimony and complained about his translators), but his excuse that he was co-operating because he was 'a guest' in the US, and his claims that his writings were 'revolutionary' only because of the need to stir up his countrymen against Hitler, made him unpopular with his friends in Hollywood. He left for Europe the day after testifying, and stayed there.

When the War was over, and in the midst of the US's increasing hostility to Communism, he left for Europe in 1947 and eventually settled in the new East Germany in 1949. With his second wife, Helene Weigel, an actress and Communist Party member, he established the Berliner Ensemble, where he staged productions of pre-existing plays until his death in 1956.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BERTOLT BRECHT

- 1898** 10 February, Brecht born in Augsburg, Germany.
- 1917** Enrolled at Munich University to study Medicine.
- 1922** Receives the Kleist Prize for young writers.
- 1924** Moves to Berlin.
- 1925** Klabund's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Berlin directed by Max Reinhardt.
- 1928** *The Threepenny Opera* opens at the Am Schiffbauerdamm Theatre in Berlin, later the home of the Berliner Ensemble.
- 1933** 28 February, The burning of the Reichstag – the following day Brecht leaves Germany and lives in various European cities such as Zurich, Denmark, Moscow, Sweden and Finland.
- 1938** Makes notes for a version of *Chalk Circle* to be set in Denmark in 11th century. *The Life of Galileo* completed.
- 1939** *Mother Courage and her Children* completed with significant contributions from Margarete Steffin.
- 1940** Completes *The Augsburg Chalk Circle*, a short story set in 30 Years War. Completes *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *The Trial of Lucullus*.
- 1941** Brecht moves his family to California via Moscow and Vladivostok. In LA the Brechts are classed as 'enemy aliens'. Completes *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, written with Margarete Steffin.
- 1944** Red Army drives Nazis out of the Caucasus. Writes *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.
- 1945** English version of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* completed by James and Tania Stern with WH Auden.
- 1949** Invitation to form state-subsidised Berliner Ensemble.
- 1954** Brecht directs the Berliner Ensemble in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Berliner Ensemble takes up permanent residence at the Am Schiffbauerdamm Theatre.
- 1955** West German production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* omits prologue as politically inopportune.
- 1956** Brecht dies. Two weeks later Berliner Ensemble visit Palace Theatre, London with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

BRECHT HAD TWO AIMS:

- **To present a story with social implications in such a way as to encourage the individuals in the audience to investigate those implications.**
- **To present high quality, entertaining theatre, 'Nothing needs less justification than pleasure'.**

Brecht believed that theatre should be a place where the audience could recognise existing social problems, analyse, be critical, seek solutions and take action. He thought it right and possible that an audience should be entertained and also experience a sense of social responsibility. He was passionately against the type of melodrama of his day; where a theatre audience was encouraged to be passive. Brecht wanted his audience to be engaged, thoughtful and active.

Brecht was ambitious in writing theory and devising techniques which would make an audience attentive to the fact they were watching a play. His principle method was the use of Epic Theatre and 'Verfremdungseffekte' (loosely translated as 'The Alienation' or 'Distancing Effect'). Epic Theatre in form was episodic, with each scene being a separate story that could be told in any order, with a chorus or narrator interrupting and linking the scenes. The intention being to distance the audience from what they were watching on stage so that it became unfamiliar to them, in order that they watch the play critically and make judgments, rather than being absorbed in the plot.

In Brecht's Epic Theatre, each scene is a story or statement within itself; a scene that can stand alone. Many of his plays have this epic form, often with choruses, songs, poems or commentary in between. Most scenes are titled (and productions used signs and placards), to separate them as an individual story; for example *The Flight into the Northern Mountains*, *The Story of the Judge*. Brecht juxtaposed scenes to cause the audience to think, e.g. the story of Grusha stops at the point that she is arrested by the 'Iron Shirts'. Brecht then transports us to the tale of Azdak. This is another alienating device; as the audience begin to get emotionally involved with Grusha's plight, Brecht changes the story! The audience are told what is about to happen in the scene so they can observe the scene critically as it is demonstrated before them. Brecht did not use elaborate scenery, again to remind the audience that they were watching a play. Brecht wanted audiences to leave saying 'The structure of society that caused the character to be in that situation was unfair. Things have got to change and we have to start the process!'

According to Brecht's earlier theoretical writing, actors were required to demonstrate characters rather than 'becoming' them. They were to show their character's actions, to help the audience make a judgment. With the actors having some emotional distance from their characters, they could present an attitude to the character and the situation ('Gestus' technique).

Brecht advised that: 'The actor should refrain from living himself into the part prematurely in any way, and should go on functioning as long as possible as a reader. An important step is memorising one's first impressions... Before memorising the words he must memorise what he felt astounded at and where he felt impelled to contradict. For these are dynamic forces that he must preserve in creating his performance'

Brecht's Theory of Theatrical Performance

Brecht wasn't against using emotion within Theatre, but he didn't want the audience to experience the same emotions as the character at the same time. However, despite Brecht's theories on the 'V-Effect', it is hard to remain unaffected by the plight of a young girl as she chooses between her lover and a child.

Question

- **Do you think it's possible, and valuable, to be deeply engaged watching a play, whilst remaining emotionally detached from the characters?**
- **Can you think of any other playwrights that have used Epic Theatre as a theatrical device?**

Dialectical Theatre

Brecht's ideas evolved and expanded over time. As his work and ideas developed, Brecht believed he was moving away from an Epic Theatre towards a Dialectical Theatre; a theatre revealing contradictions and choices. As Elizabeth Wright comments in Post Modern Brecht 'It is human beings who produce contradictions and hence the world must be subject to criticism and change'.

Rather than ignore them, Brecht wanted the actor to explore the contradictions and choices characters have to make. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the more Grusha protects the child's life, the more she endangers her own. Grusha is both a hero and a thief. Azdak appears a fool, but he is in fact like Shakespeare's fools – he speaks the truth and could be seen as one of the wisest characters in the play. Lavrenti lives under his wife's rule, but is prepared to behave in an overbearing way to his own sister.

Both the actor and audience need to observe these contradictions and ask where they come from.

Question

- **What contradictions do you see in our society?**
- **How might some law abiding people feel forced to break the law?**
- **What would you do for the greater good?**

BACKGROUND TO

The Caucasian Chalk Circle



Matti Houghton

Brecht's short story, *The Augsburg Chalk Circle*, was a starting point for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. It was agreed that the highly acclaimed actress, Louise Rainer, would play Grusha and so Rainer arranged with a New York backer, Jules Leventhal, to pay Brecht a monthly salary to create the play. However, Rainer and Brecht had an argument, resulting in her withdrawal from the project. Nevertheless, Brecht continued to develop the play and created the 2nd Act of Azdak's story. Brecht's friend, Oscar Homolka, agreed to play the role of Azdak. In 1944, Brecht redrafted *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* after being told by Lion Feuchtwanger that the character of Grusha was 'too pure and simple' and therefore impossible to sympathise with. Brecht introduced, among other things, the scenes where Grusha poses as a noblewoman.

Ruth Berlau (also known as 'Red Ruth') played a fundamental role in the writing of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Berlau was Brecht's secretary and co writer, but she also had a long affair with him. At the beginning of Brecht's time in America, she lived with him and his wife until the constant arguments between the two women caused her to move out. Berlau became pregnant with Brecht's child, but in September 1944, as they were finishing *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht and Berlau's son was born prematurely and died two days later. Their child, like the child in the play, was called Michael. The baby was kept a secret. Berlau is credited with writing two love scenes within *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Brecht turned to working on *The Life of Galileo* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* remained unknown for several more years.

The world premiere of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was at a small theatre at Carleton College, Minnesota in May 1948, seven months after Brecht had left America. It was performed without the prologue (the prologue was not performed in the United States until 1965 due to its 'espousal' of revolutionary principles). Brecht staged the play himself with the Berliner Ensemble in 1953, but it was at the Paris International Theatre Festival in 1955 that *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* started to attract attention and has since been considered one of Brecht's most acclaimed works.

SYNOPSIS

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a play within a play. Peasants are arguing over land and in the evening after their meal a play is performed with the message that resources should belong to those who make the best use of them - the child to Grusha and the valley to those who will care for it.

When the city of Grusinia is taken over by the Iron Shirts, the Governor's wife Natella Abashvili abandons her child as she runs for her life. A servant girl Grusha picks up the child and decides to keep it and look after it. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* tells the tale of Grusha's escape from the Iron Shirts, her relationship with a soldier and the choices and sacrifices she has to make in order to protect the child. It also tells the tale of Azdak, a village clerk who becomes judge; judging in favour of the poor and misrepresented. Azdak is called to judge whether Grusha or Natella Abashvili is the true mother of the child and carries out the test of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Central characters

- Grusha - household maid to the Governor's wife
- Simon - a soldier
- Azdak - a judge
- Shauva - a policeman
- The Governor's wife - Natella Abashvili

Scenes

- Prologue - *The Struggle for the Valley*
- Act 1 - *The Noble child*
- Act 2 - *The Flight into the Northern Mountains*
- Act 3 - *In the Northern Mountains*
- Act 4 - *The Story of the Judge*
- Act 5 - *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

Themes within *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

- Exploitation
- Justice
- War & Peace
- Ownership & Belonging
- Hatred
- Poverty
- Land & Borders
- The difficulty of choice
- Sacrifice
- Reason & Instinct
- Money
- Communism & Capitalism
- Religion
- Love & Compassion

Question

- **Look at Act 2 '*The flight into the Northern Mountains*': how many of these themes can you find?**
- **What devices does Brecht use to get his message across?**

BRECHT'S USE OF MUSIC

For Brecht, it was music that made *'poetic theatre'* possible. At first he would compose the music himself, which was used as underscore to comedy, film projections and battle scenes, but soon songs were added too. Poetry was put to music on Brecht's guitar and was often performed in cabaret style. Songs were sung verse by verse during visible scene changes. The songs were without regular beats, stresses or bars. The rhythm was meant to follow that of the words; the metrics lay in the verse whose shape and sense were not to be distorted by being sung.

Brecht started to work alongside various musicians and composers, and by *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928 (composed by Kurt Weill) there was a separation of music from other elements of entertainment, through:

- Orchestra visible on stage
- Change of lighting for the singing of songs
- Orchestra lit, titles and numbers of songs projected onto screen. For example: 'Song concerning the insufficiency of human endeavour'
- Actors changing their positions before songs began

Brecht's music was of a reflective and moralising nature, songs had a purpose to inform, and modern, rather than traditional music was applied to songs. He wanted the music to stimulate thought and he wanted his songs to be 'Gestic', communicating not only the meaning of the words, but the attitude of the singer. He wanted his ballads to be socially critical, often with ironic references to conventional music.

Paul Dessau wrote incidental music for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, partly based on folk dances from Azerbaijan.

Question

- **Brecht looked towards a future where actors played AGAINST the emotion which the music generated - Do you think this is possible?**

Discussions points

Music

- When in your opinion was the most effective use of music, sound or song in the production, and why?
- How are the songs used as a story-telling device in this epic play?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Chorus

Look at the excerpt of Grusha's monologue below (Act 1, *The Noble Child*) when Grusha decides to take Michael with her.

- In 3 small groups, read through the excerpt of Grusha's monologue below.
- Group 1 - Work on sharing the lines and present to the rest of the group.
- Group 2 - Tell the story of the monologue together, travel it around the room. The objective is to stay together so an outside observer would not be able to tell whom the group is following at any point. Present to the rest of the group.
- Group 3 - Approach the speech with just one actor. The rest of the group become the directors. Present to the rest of the group

Whole group discussion

- What do the 3 different approaches offer or take away from the impact of the text?
- Nancy's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* had the community chorus on stage continuously. What purpose do they serve?
- What effect did this have on you as audience member?

(excerpt from Act 1, *The Noble Child*)

SINGER: AS SHE STOOD BETWEEN DOORWAY AND GATEWAY
SHE HEARD OR THOUGHT SHE HEARD THE CHILD
CALLING OUT.

NOT WHIMPERING LIKE A CHILD
BUT CALLING OUT CLEARLY, OR THAT'S HOW IT
SEEMED,

CALLING OUT 'WOMAN. PLEASE HELP ME.'

NOT WHIMPERING LIKE A CHILD
BUT CALLING OUT CLEARLY:

'WOMAN, KNOW THIS:

WHOEVER DOES NOT HEAR A CRY FOR HELP
BUT COVERS UP THEIR EARS AND WALKS ON
WILL NEVER HEAR THE SOFT CALL OF A LOVER,
WILL NEVER HEAR THE BLACKBIRD SING AT DAWN
WILL NEVER HEAR AT SUNSET THE WEARY SIGHS OF
WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD
AS THE ANGELUS RINGS OUT.'

INTERVIEW WITH ILONA SEKACZ COMPOSER

How did you initially approach composing the music for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*?

The way I always do, which was quite a lot of background listening and research; starting with a large pool of CD's of classical jazz and mainly world music, looking at the play and the lyrics and finding what seems to gel.

I centred on the place where the play is set in Georgia, the Caucasus, and looked at the neighbouring countries as well, because the play talks about Generals in Iran. The country between Georgia and Iran is Azerbaijan, so I did a lot of listening to Azerbaijani music and from a little further a field. You get a sense of something part way between Central/Eastern Europe and the Middle East. It crosses a nice area of folk music and so I used that as the basis. The richness of the Azerbaijani folk music is huge, using accordions, pianos and the voice and there's a whole wealth of Azerbaijani dance music that sounds like tango, so I've used some elements of that.

Was it particularly important that the music felt Brechtian and supported his musical ideas?

It did have a heavy influence yes. We did quite a lot of research on Brecht's attitude to music. I think it's important to know where it's coming from and why, if you don't respect that, I think you're missing a huge amount of reasoning behind the music.

One has to take into consideration the aspects of the music which Brecht had expectations of – in other words the music shouldn't castrate the text, it should really support the words. It's very important that the actors and the words are self illustrative and that the music is a kind of bedding on which you place those words, so that the most important focus in the production in terms of the singing, is not on the music, but on the words. The text and the lyrics break down into story-telling, expressing the thoughts in the minds of the characters that they are unable to express themselves.

One has to sometimes pull back on the melodic aspects of the music, taking away all the melody, letting the rhythm of the words dictate the rhythm of the music, which is not always natural when you're listening to music. If you go with the rhythm of the words that you're using in normal speech you end up with something which is quite unmusical. So the challenge is to be able to make it listenable to, whilst keeping Brecht's expectations and his input, as well as your own musical integrity.

What work have you done with the actors?

I've been working with the actors since we started rehearsal – and initially we did a lot of what's called 'note bashing', which is teaching the actors, principally the Singer and Grusha, to get the songs under their belt. There are about forty-five different songs; Grusha has six, the Singer has about thirty and the rest are taken by other members of the company. There's the play, wedding scene, dancing and little songs, then there are political songs done in a humorous way. I'm trying to bring thematic music through, so we don't just use a different piece of music for every single song.

INTERVIEW WITH ILONA SEKACZ COMPOSER

Are the same instruments being used through out?

Yes, basically the instruments are just two players, we have an accordion player and we have a percussionist and he can play a variety of instruments, so we get colour from that, and we get melody and harmony from the accordionist. In addition to that we have an actor who plays the flute, ukulele and guitar.

How have you worked with Nancy?

I did a lot of work on my own and at various stages I compiled a dozen interesting tracks for Nancy to listen to - to give an idea of where I was thinking of taking my models for the music. From there we refined it a little and I'd go away and do a lot more research.

Derek Barnes (Chorus Director), Nancy and I did all the auditions together and put together a community chorus of sixty singers for all of the venues, with only ever thirty on stage at a time. They're singing about twenty five songs and will be an integral part of the production.

Practical Exercises

Vocal themes

- In small groups using just your voices create a soundscape theme for Grusha and a theme for the Governess.



Ilona Sekacz

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

WHAT DO I WANT?

Each character in the production has an over-arching 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. There is also an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective. During rehearsals, Nancy, the director and the actors discussed what each character's objective and obstacle might be. These are never carved in stone as through the rehearsals ideas grow and change.

Katherine Toy

Character - Ludovica.

Super Objective - To blame the stable boy (to frame him) for raping her, in order to protect her own honour, as she was caught in flagrante with him.

Obstacles - She has to lie convincingly and is unaware of how worldly and sensual she appears and of how transparent her testimony is.

Favourite Line - *'I said 'Do not do that stable boy'.'*

Jed Aukin

Character - Bizergan Kazbeki (Fat Prince's Nephew).

Super Objective - To be powerful.

Obstacles - The People who are uprising.

Favourite Line - *'Um, you will be hanged by the neck until dead and so forth and so on.'*

James Clyde

Character - Azdak.

Super Objective - To establish his version of justice.

Obstacle - His own cynicism.

Favourite Line - *'How often have I told you? I don't have a good heart. I'm an intellectual.'*

Matti Houghton

Character - Grusha.

Super Objective - Survival.

Obstacle - To live life on her own terms.

Favourite Line - *'Never be afraid of the wind, Michael. The wind's a sad old dog too. He has to push the clouds along and feels the cold more than anyone.'*

Peter Bankolé

Character - Simon Khakhava.

Super Objective - To earn a reasonable salary in order to settle down and start a family.

Obstacles - The dangers of life as a soldier during a violent uprising.

Favourite Line - *'Ah, but a fart has no nose.'*

Discussions points

Character:

- Choose one character in the play: what is their Super Objective in:
 - a. The whole play?
 - b. A particular scene?
- Who do you believe to be the most powerful character in the play?
- Which character did you have most empathy for & why?

INTERVIEW WITH MATTI HOUGHTON

GRUSHA

How would you describe Grusha?

A young woman, who is trying to survive in a very challenging world. She is direct and driven by a sense of inherent justice.

Have you acted in a Brecht play before, and what's it like rehearsing a Brecht play with Shared Experience?

I've never done any Brecht before, but working with Shared Experience feels like a truly collaborative process. That's what makes it unique.

What work have you done to explore Grusha's emotional journey?

With Shared Experience you explore in great depth the physical nature of your characters emotional journey; expressing the highs and lows through abstract movement. A VERY helpful process.

Which scenes present the biggest challenges?

At the moment (week 3) most scenes are a huge challenge!

Why does Grusha take on Michael as her own?

A connection is formed beyond Grusha's control. She has cared for and looked after Michael, given up everything to give him something.

How do you see the play being relevant to a modern audience?

'Everything belongs by right to those who care for it.' This idea is still something we debate today, whether it's over money, our family, land, or indeed, how we must look after and value the earth.



Matti Houghton

Discussions points

Further Character study

- Look at Grusha's decision-making moments in the play; for example taking the child, crossing the bridge, marrying Jessup.
- What are the stages of development in her relationship with Michael?
- At what point does Grusha accept Michael as her own?

Practical Exercises

Grusha's decision moments

- Note Grusha's three key decision moments: to take the child, when the child becomes hers, and when she fights for the child.
- In three small groups, create a still image of one of Grusha's decision moments in context of the scene.
- After seeing each image, the whole group discuss; What is happening? What is going through her mind? How does she feel?
- Now in each small group, two people portray Grusha; one express her moment of decision and one create an image which expresses Grusha's internal emotions, an embodiment of her feelings.

Song

Look at the excerpt below (Act 2, *The flight into the Northern Mountains*), Grusha is just about to cross the bridge with Michael. Discuss the meaning of the song as a group. Use this text to compose your own song. Using just your voices and musical instruments if possible.

(excerpt from Act 2, *The flight into the Northern Mountains*)

GRUSHA: DEEP IS THE ABYSS MY SON
BRIDGES MADE OF REED,
BUT WE DO NOT CHOOSE, MY SON,
WHERE OUR FOOTSTEPS LEAD.
LONG IS THE ROAD
GREY IS THE SKY
STALE IS OUR BREAD
BROKEN AND DRY.
A FEW SCRAPS TO EAT
FOR YOU AND FOR ME,
I WILL TAKE ONE,
YOU WILL HAVE THREE.
WILL THAT BE ENOUGH?
WE'LL JUST HAVE TO SEE,
WE'LL JUST HAVE TO SEE.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER BANKOLÉ SIMON KHAKHAVA

Have you worked with Shared Experience before?

I've not worked with the company before but I have worked in a very physical way through my time at the RSC. I have also worked with our movement director Liz Ranken a number of times before and knew of Nancy Meckler, our director, and of the very visual and expressive style of Shared Experience.

What's the process?

A typical day for us will start with a rigorous physical and vocal warm up because for this company the physicality is as important as the voice and the text. As actors we need to be constantly physically aware and alert. We will then move onto improvisation exercises around a scene. We have just been working on the soldiers so Nancy and Liz set an improvisation based on status: how soldiers, captains and the captured display their status through their voice and physicality. Once we spent time experimenting in these improvisations we then moved into a scene. It's very thorough work and by the time we reach running a scene we are very prepared physically and emotionally.

What background research have you done in preparing for your character?

The way I approach research is mainly through film or documentary. My character in this piece is a soldier so I have watched lots of war movies, read books and undertaken internet research on the subject. I have been very interested by the effect of war on soldiers, their partners and their families and particularly the moment that a soldier leaves for war when there's a possibility that they will not come back. This has fed into the scene between Grusha and Simon:

Simon: All I'm going to do is escort the governor's wife to where the troops are still loyal. When the war's over, I'll be back. Two weeks, maybe three...

The subtext beneath this is that there is the possibility he will not return, that Grusha will never see him again and in fact it is two years before he returns.

What is the challenge within this production for the actor?

Most of the company play a number of parts and the biggest challenge within that is to ensure that they are all brought to life in a rounded way. All the characters should have equal weight regardless of how many lines a character has or how long they feature in the play. Nancy's vision for this production is to tell a story and central to that is giving the characters depth. I find this very appealing as I love creating characters and the way we are approaching the text is allowing time for play and experimentation. The central questions we are looking at in bringing these characters to life, is how do the characters relate to the world around them, what do they think about themselves, what do they think about others, what do other characters think about them?

A MOVEMENT REHEARSAL

The Movement Director, Liz Ranken, begins rehearsal with a warm up: a sequence of stretches and breathing exercises, building from slow, calm movement to more energetic exercises.

This particular rehearsal focuses on the soldiers in the play. In an improvisation, Liz and Nancy ask the actors to explore the soldiers' physicality through a series of questions:

- How does a Captain behave?
- How does the lowly Soldier react to orders?
- How does the Prisoner respond to a soldier's cruelty?

The actors play with the status of their allocated character. Liz asks the actors to focus on tension within the body of the soldiers; tension in their chests, an upright physical posture and their heads held high denotes power. The actors play out the improvisation, allowing dynamics and ideas to develop. As they continue the exercise, Nancy and Liz pick up on a particular moment and give guidance to the actors, for example; that the soldiers should have rigidity running through their whole body which never relaxes, that they should have clenched fists as though they are ready to fight at any moment.

The actors then go straight on to rehearsing a specific scene in the play, using some of the character ideas and physicality arising from the improvisation. The physicality is hugely important to the way a character is perceived by other characters in the play and by the audience. Having experimented with certain behaviour and gestures, the actor can now start to use this material in the creation of the character.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Ball pattern

- Keep the ball up in the air. Whenever you hit it shout your name
- Stand in a circle and create a pattern by always throwing the ball to the same person and shouting their name
- Repeat the pattern
- Later introduce a second ball: throw it to someone else and thereby create a different pattern.

Sound & Gesture

- Stand in a circle. The first person makes a random, free, movement and sound towards the person on their right involving the whole body.
- That person should then repeat this movement and sound and create a new one which they pass to their right and so on around the circle.
- Respond quickly, don't think about them, just follow your impulse
- Ensemble-together version: The whole circle repeats every movement and sound at the same time. Try to build up a group rhythm.

Zombie

This is an effective ice-breaker and ensemble game, where the group pursue a collective objective together.

- The group is seated on chairs throughout the space.
- One person is designated as being '*zombie*' and they are asked to vacate their seat and stand at the opposite end of the space. The person who is '*zombie*' wants to become '*alive*', so is given the objective of moving across the space at walking pace to sit back down in their chair, which will give them 'life'.
- The group is given the objective of preventing the zombie from sitting in their chair. To do this, one of them must make the choice to leave their own chair and sit down on the zombie's chair.
- If someone does this, the chair which they have vacated becomes the zombie person's target.
- Once a member of the group has left their chair, they may not sit back down upon it.
- If the zombie reaches the target chair, the leader chooses a new person to be zombie. Usually there will be someone on their feet who is the obvious choice as the next zombie.

Warm Down; Group Counting

This is a good exercise for group unity, focus and listening. It works well both before a performance and to make a point on acting: you have to receive in order to relate. In other words, you have to listen to what other people are doing in order to know what to do yourself.

- The group stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, with their eyes closed. The task is to collectively count to ten out loud with everyone saying a number, no-one saying successive numbers and no-one speaking at the same time.
- If members of the group speak at the same time the leader directs them to start again.
- The group may not get to ten, but that's okay. If they get to 10 easily they continue with the aim of getting to twenty and so on.

Image transitions

- In groups, create three frozen images: the first a happy family scene; the second an image capturing the stress, panic and fear of emigration; and in the third image show how the second image has affected the once happy family. What's changed? What are the overriding emotions that you need to show in image three?

Statuses

- In pairs create 2 statues of:
 - 1) A strong and turbulent emotion
 - 2) A person trying to present a calm exterior to the world whilst this buried emotion runs riot inside them.

Chair exercise

- Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors (A and B) each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a '*want*', which needs to work in opposition with their partners '*want*'. For example:
A: to punish B
B: to want forgiveness from A
- Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!
- One person '*speaks*' by moving their chair in relation to the other, then the second actor '*answers*' by moving his/her chair. Each person's physical '*sentence*' is complete when he/she places their chair back on the floor. The actor must stay in contact with his/her chair at all times. They pursue their '*want*' in opposition to their partner. Their objective is to win their case and to change/dissuade the other actor in theirs.

Status

- Each member is given one card from 2 to 10 (2 being the lowest and 10 the highest)
- Don't look at the card but hold it on your forehead so that everyone can see what status you have, (only you don't know which number you represent)
- Imagine you are at a social event. Try to figure out what status you have by the way others react to you. At the same time treat people according to their status
- Finally the group should try to line up in the order of the number they think they have
- Consider the characters in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Their outer status is how they are perceived. Their inner status is how they perceive themselves. These may change according to different situations. The difference between the two may create conflict.

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPHINE BUTLER

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE

What's it like working with Shared Experience?

This is my first time working with Shared Experience and one of the most exciting experiences of my professional career. This job is a whole new approach to being an actor for me and is a genuinely collaborative process. A director often has a very strong and definite idea of how a production will look and leads the company into that vision. However Nancy [Meckler, the director] and Shared Experience approach the rehearsal process in a different way, allowing the company to be totally inventive and original. For example, in rehearsal yesterday we were looking at the Innkeeper scene where Grusha is looking for a room for her and Michael, and Nancy came up with an idea of using a clothes rail full of clothes as the door to the inn. She set us off experimenting with different ways of using the rail until we finally found a way that we settled on. In this process we have time to play and experiment and all ideas are considered and valid.

What would you say is at the heart of the way the company works?

I would say that telling the story is key to the way the company works. Shared Experience takes the audience on a journey which is an emotional and visceral experience. Shared Experience have a reputation for their physical work but from my experience that physical element comes out of a desire to tell the story in the best possible way and it's a way that challenges both actor and audience.

What do you see as the central themes of the play?

In rehearsals we have talked about the central question that the play poses. Nancy currently sees that question as: 'In a war torn world is it possible for justice and compassion to exist?' This is what we are exploring at the moment. I actually think that the play answers 'yes' to that question through Grusha. Against everything she rescues Michael and risks her life and future for him through her own compassion.

Have you done any background research around these themes?

We have had group discussions around what this story reminds us of and the parallel we have all drawn is with Iraq. A war that is being fought by us but somewhere else. We have photos of soldiers on the wall in the rehearsal room. Recently we were working on the scene where the Governor is murdered and somebody drew a comparison with the famous toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue in 2004. After looking this up on the laptop we started to recreate this image during the killing of the Governor. Of course this might not feature in the final version of the scene but it's something we are exploring.

How are you approaching the character of the Governor's Wife?

My character comes across as incredibly vain, bossy and difficult but nobody just is vain, bossy and difficult, there has to be a cause for this behaviour. Nancy is really pushing us to look at this so that we don't generalise in developing the character, she's asking us the bigger question about what has caused the behaviour so that there's a depth to the portrayal. Perhaps the reason for the Governor's Wife's vanity is that she is deeply insecure, perhaps when she demands her silver dress as her servants are preparing to flee, it's not done out of bossiness or for the sake of being difficult, but because she cannot cope with the situation. Looking at a character in this way enables the actor to see the complexities of a character, make them more real and reveal their vulnerability. And that's interesting and engaging for an audience.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S REHEARSAL DIARY EXTRACTS

Rehearsal week 1

Monday 17th - Friday 21st August

So far, our director, Nancy Meckler has been working with the company to build an ensemble and create a strong sense of communication and trust. We have also begun character development, using a variety of exercises to help actors think about their characters' wants and needs and how they go about fulfilling them.

Ilona Sekacz, who has composed an original score for the show, has been working the group hard. She has been teaching the actors and musicians the fabulous songs she has created, which are influenced by the styles and sounds of the folk music of Azerbaijan.

Liz Ranken, our movement director ran an exhilarating morning session. Her workshop encouraged the actors to experience how our emotions, surroundings and background affect our physicality.

Everyone is extremely hard working and there is also a lot of laughter in the room as we discover the wit and humour in Brecht's text - we think it's going to be a fantastic Shared Experience!

Rehearsal week 2

Monday 24th August

Today was our first day at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. The company were welcomed by the fantastic staff and taken on a tour around the building. We have two brilliantly equipped rehearsal rooms to work in, lots of props and a 'mock up' of the set. This helps the actors to begin working with the shape of the set and the props. We have been discovering that Brecht loved props and Nancy is working with the actors to discover the character's emotional journeys and also the 'journeys' of their props.

In order to encourage the actors to think about how a person achieves their 'wants' in life, Nancy ran a fascinating improvisation. Two actors were each given a chair, one of them was told that without using any words they were to position their chair and sit on it with the intention of punishing the other person. The other actor was then asked to respond to this position by moving their chair and sitting on it in a position which asked for forgiveness. This was repeated so that a dialogue was created with each actor trying to achieve their want as actively as possible. Nancy then added another layer to the emotional content of this improvisation by putting an obstacle in the way of the actor. Now the person doing the punishing ALSO has to convey that they don't want to lose their partner's love and the person asking for forgiveness ALSO has to convey that they don't have much time.

This distilled form of communication enabled the actors to explore how humans go about achieving their wants and also encouraged them to think about the power of communication through physicality. Since this exercise was introduced it has been used to great effect to help the actors get into scenes before uttering any words- simply playing their characters wants and reacting to what is given to them 'in the moment' from other characters.

Wednesday 26th August

One of the scenes we rehearsed today was the scene in which Grusha is trying to get a room at an Inn by befriending two upper class ladies. The status of the characters in this scene is rather complicated; Grusha is pretending to be very rich and high status so that the upper class ladies will let her stay with them, the two upper class ladies have always felt high status but are now in great danger and the Innkeeper, who has always been very low status, now holds all the power.

Nancy helped the actors understand these tensions by giving the characters an external status (what they are showing to the outside world) and an internal status (what they are feeling but not showing). We have created a vocabulary for status through exercises in rehearsals so that the actors understand what playing a person of status 1 (very low) is like compared to that of a person of status 10 (very high). The actor playing the Innkeeper had the challenge of finding a way of playing a character who externally appears to have a status of about 4, but who feels much more like a 10 inside.

Thursday 27th August

Liz Walker, the puppet trainer, came into rehearsals today. We are using a puppet for the little boy, Michael who grows from a baby into a toddler during the course of the play. The whole company has fallen in love with the puppet and it is extraordinary to see him come to life when handled in the right way.

Learning how to move the puppet on stage has been a source of much investigation and experiment. We've tried lots of ideas and it's all been really fun. There is a mixture of precision and emotional connection to moving the puppet, it is also very strenuous on the hands and the actors have been asked to do special hand exercises to build up their strength!

Elle While

Assistant Director



The Puppet

INTERVIEW WITH COLIN RICHMOND

DESIGNER

What were your initial starting points and what kind of research did you do?

Nancy and I discussed lots of possibilities of how to stage *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. We were initially working from an old text, as this is a new version. We gleaned any information we could about past productions, the work of Brecht; through his writings and other people's accounts of their experiences of him. Basically it was trying to understand the text. After we had a couple of conversations about this and got our heads around the plots, sub plots, individual stories etc, we decided on how best to stage the show.

We looked through a great number of different references before we hit on where we got to eventually. These references included Afghanistan, and Iraq; looking at forgotten lands and places of mass destruction in small communities and the effects of war on an innocent place and people. This included those attacked by hurricanes ('Hurricane Katrina' for instance) and other natural disasters such as floods. It was the minutiae of detail that Nancy and I seemed drawn to, that of domestic scenes, piles of shoes abandoned, wardrobes tossed on their sides, elements of domesticity in juxtaposition with each other, a sad jumble sale of people's lives.

This felt like the best point to start creating our little world, building our set out of the ruins of a destroyed community at the hands of corrupt people. Then to make theatre simply out of old odds and ends, found items, as though this play within the play is an impromptu affair. It is so strong a story that it can be told in the simplest manner, with the simplest of things. It felt right, and in reference to Brecht's work; simple story telling in a relevant and current environment.

How have you incorporated the presence of the community chorus in your set?

We always knew there would be one factor that we would have to embrace open armed, that being the 30 person community chorus. The conundrum came in the form of where best to place them as part of the action? We never wanted them to be an add on... they are as integral to this production as any other element, or person and so they in essence provide us with our backdrop. In a way, it's like we are playing the piece in the round, at times they participate, at others they are spectators.

They sit amongst the assembled remnants of the community's lives; as much a part of the structure, and as much an integral part of our story as any of our forefront actors. The biggest challenge was where we put them and we agreed from the start that they should be ever present through out and engaged with the story at all times.

How does the use of reclaimed materials and objects in the set help to convey the emotional life of the play along with the physical environment?

It was important for us to make the structure that the choral members sit on out of old reclaimed furniture, be it old bedside tables, arms chairs, car seats, stools, baskets, suitcases. It was driven in that direction from images we felt drawn to from the outset.

The items are domestic and dotted amongst it are old angle poises, old speakers, standard lamps, people's kitchen floors, cornicing from their living room. This gives us a sense of community and allows us to relate to and recognise parts of the setting, to somehow feel involved in this community.

It's a play rooted in people and moral standings, it felt right to keep it real and less about 'scenery', and big theatrical devices. The idea of forming the layered up chorus bank, was about creating order out of chaos and showing to the destructors that this is a strong community who will make the best out of a horrid situation. Everything will be reclaimed in some way, we hope including the old lighting lamps, and sound speakers.

How does the costume correlate to your set design concept?

Costumes will be much like the set, in that they will be created from found items pieced together. The hardest part for us all, but the most exciting, is the amount of doubling on the behalf of our actors. At one moment they could be a servant and the next an architect.... so changes have to be simple, yet significant. We're intending to play a lot with costume, creating characters on an existing base of a costume. It will evolve and hopefully be very exciting, fun and anarchic for everyone.

What has been the biggest challenge in designing for the different venues?

We have created a quite contained playing space, but that being said, squeezing 30 chorus members into it is not easy. So in a certain venue, they will spill into our wings, but hopefully not to the detriment of the piece.

It's hard to design for large spaces like the quarry stage in the West Yorkshire Playhouse and then place it in the not so large Richmond Theatre... both are very different. It'll be a different experience for everyone in all the venues, but our little world will hopefully be just as strong and poetic. We wanted a feeling of isolated desolation, in a surround of darkness.

We have a new chorus everywhere we go as well, so creating a form that is new-person friendly was essential as well. It's a quick get in to fit up the set, wire the sound and lights and prep the chorus and actors on the set for each venue, so it has to be something that is tour friendly. We've been lucky, because we have been able to achieve what we wanted without too many tour restrictions... to date any how!

Discussions points

Design:

- How did the costumes in the play help to depict the characters?
- How did the lighting and sound design enhance the atmosphere of the play?
- What was your favourite aspect of the design?
- If you were designing this production and could choose the venue/theatre/space, what would you choose and how would your design differ from ours?



Model Box of Set Design

IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD CAN FAIRNESS & JUSTICE EXIST?

This question frames our production; and through this an exploration of how true justice can prevail. Investigating Theme of fairness in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Nancy Meckler asks: *'In terms of ownership, who can claim to 'own' a child, or 'own' a piece of land? Is the deserving owner the one who got there first, or gave birth to the child, or is the deserving owner the person who nurtures the thing at stake?'*

In the prologue, Alistair uses much of Brecht's arguments and adds others of his own. In presenting the politics of the play, the questions are posed: who does the land rightly belong to? Those who have lived there for a length of time, or those who can make best use of it...

The character of the Old Farmer laments on the importance of home and belonging to your land: *'It matters where you were born. It matters what the trees look like, what neighbours you have. Those aren't little things.'*

Whereas the Foreign Expert makes a rational, practical case: *'This country needs to export, and that means cash crops...this country's been under-performing; it's time Guginia fulfilled its potential. Think what the international community can offer you. Clean water. Electricity. Roads. New housing. Schools. An export driven agribusiness. But these plans are only viable if all these small farms of yours are rationalised. Made competitive.'*

His inherent capitalistic view is to focus on the most time efficient, productive modern way for the country to *'progress'*, whilst the Old Farmer has an emotional connection to the place he was born and fears he will lose his land in the name of progress.

The location of our prologue and stage set is deliberately ambiguous, to allow us to suggest a modern context. The play within the play is set in *'Grusinia'*; an imaginary medieval Georgia. When imagining war torn countries and fighting over land, we might think of the current problems in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Sudan...

Historically, dispute over land and ownership is one of the root causes of war and conflict. It might not be possible to reach a consensus about justice and fairness in arguments of war, but we may be presented with the individual experience of compassion over hatred, as we are with the story of Grusha Vashnadze, a peasant girl who works as maid to the Governor's wife. The protagonist of the second story is Azdak, the village scribe, a disillusioned idealist and alcoholic, who becomes a judge by chance.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle may be seen as two entirely separate stories, which could stand alone in their own right. When discussing this in rehearsals, one of the actors asserted that the two stories are very much connected through Grusha and Azdak's innate sense of justice. The character of Grusha represents compassion. Azdak represents justice (albeit corrupt), and through their meeting at the end of the play, fairness prevails. It is compassion that inspires justice. Azdak's inner sense of moral compassion is clouded by cynicism and selfish and destructive behaviour. He has so far judged in a reckless fashion, generally taking from the rich and giving to the poor with little discretion or principle, but when Grusha boldly attacks him she shames him, unearthing his humanity, enabling him to act as a fair judge:

Grusha *'I'll tell you what I think of your justice, you drunken old fart...Aren't you ashamed to see me shaking in front of you? You've made yourself their obedient servant. You're doing the dirty work that lets them drag our men off to their wars. You traitor. I don't respect you...they should only choose money lenders and child abusers to be judges...'* (Act 5, *'The Caucasian Chalk Circle'*)

Azdak suspends the case for a short time and speaks to Grusha: *'I see you have a soft spot for justice. I don't believe it's your child, but if it were, wouldn't you want it to be rich?'* He asks this question genuinely; doesn't she want the best for the child? He quickly realises that his duty as a judge *'is to choose a mother for the child', rather than determine who gave birth to him'*. And so he devises *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* test, which sees Grusha granted the child.

In this epic play, Brecht uses the eternal, universal theme of motherly love to depict essential human kindness. Grusha makes hard choices in the play; caring for Michael means responsibility and sacrifice. She takes on the Governor's baby as her own, even though it is not in her best interests to do so. Her decision to care for him shows us the human instinct for compassion, goodness and love. She risks her life crossing the bridge and chooses to marry Jessup over her betrothed, Simon Khakhava, in order to save Michael's life. The play forces us to consider what love asks of us as individuals.

So inseparable from Themes of fairness and justice, are love and compassion. It can, in the simplest reading, be seen as an idealistic play with its happy ending: the enlightened judge Azdak grants the good Grusha ownership of the child she has cared for over his biological and selfish mother, and divorces her from a marriage of convenience, free to marry Simon.



Steven Meo

QUESTIONS & PRACTICAL EXERCISES

The Character Of Azdak -

- Is it better for a country to have a justice system that is corrupt, or to have no justice system at all?
- What are his thoughts on the law?
- Do you think he is motivated by an underlying sense of justice?
- Is it class consciousness that drives him, or just personal greed?

Brecht lived through the rise of the Nazis and their persecutory laws, implemented by unquestioning judges. When Brecht was living in America, the US Congress investigated him for suspected involvement with the Communist Party.

- How do you think these experiences may have influenced his writing *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*?

Research

- Can you find any parallels between the play and real-life revolutions?
- Does every crisis of power naturally lead to the clearing away of the old judicial order?

Discussions points

Theme - Ownership:

- Who do you think the child, Michael truly belongs to?
- What do you think happens to him after the end of the play?

Practical Exercises

Finding the essence of the play

- Note the title of each act. What does the title imply?
- Now create a group image of each title (each act).
- Decide what the crucial moment of each act is. For example, Grusha takes the child in Act 1
- Now make an image-led short dramatic sequence of this moment, loosely a 'dance'.
- The images you create can be naturalistic or abstract; demonstrating the literal action, or the emotion within a scene.

Practical Exercises

Line of belief

The leader explains to the group that there is an invisible line which stretches the length of the room. One end (e.g. the left) signifies: *'I completely agree'* and the opposite end (the right) signifies *'I completely disagree'*. The middle stands for: *'I'm not sure'*. The leader calls out provocative statements related to themes and issues within *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (as listed below). Each person in the group must respond to each statement by placing themselves somewhere along the line.

The leader may work quickly, making one statement after another, then choose the ones which had the most powerful response and start a discussion. Or, after each statement and movement, pick out one or two people and ask why they have placed themselves where they have.

- Land belongs to those who have lived there longest
- Following your heart is more important than following your head
- A child belongs to those who can best look after it
- Words can solve any disagreement
- *'An eye for an eye'*
- All wars are futile
- The poor are more deserving than the rich

The Ending

The aim of this exercise is to raise discussion about Themes in the play, particularly about fairness.

Divide the class into three groups; give each group one of the three possible endings and some time to discuss and develop an argument for why their ending is the most just.

Bring the three groups together to present their argument and debate.

The three endings:

- Azdak gives baby Michael to his biological mother, the Governess.
- Simon cannot not forgive Grusha for marrying another, or accept Michael as his own.
- Azdak is hung at the gallows before the Grand Duke arrives.

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES CLYDE AZDAK AND SINGER

What is the impact on the story of you playing both Azdak and the Singer?

In the prologue, Arkady Chiadze is described as both a singer and actor; it's his company putting on the play so it makes sense he would take the meaty roles for himself. Having the same actor play both parts, as happened in Brecht's original production, reminds the audience of Brecht's framing device - that we are watching a play within a play. As a performer, getting to play both parts is a gift.

How have you approached performing the role of the Singer?

I've tried to use my own voice. The Singer's role in the play is to enhance both the narrative and the emotional life of the characters, rather than be a 'character' himself. Having said that, I see Arkady Chiadze as a high-status person with a seriously big ego.

How have you worked with Ilona and the company to create the music and why is it so important to this play?

The songs are 100% Ilona's, but there are always going to be changes and adaptations when the songs are performed in context. Ilona and I worked through the songs at the piano for a week or so, then Katherine (accordion player) joined us and then Tim (percussion). Finally, we'll get to work with the chorus who have been rehearsing separately. The music is integral to the play; music and song in a Brechtian anti-realist setting enhances narrative, rather than the use of song in some musicals, which is often decorative or escapist.

What does Azdak truly want in the story?

Azdak is a drunk, a rogue and wants to undermine society, not unlike Brecht himself, by all accounts, but he's also an idealist with a good heart, however cynical he appears. Ultimately, I think he wants to establish justice in its purist form, as something selfless and courageous that tries to understand the human condition.

Has there been a particularly useful rehearsal exercise that's helped you develop the character of Azdak?

Nancy Meckler did an exercise I hadn't done before: you physically manipulate another actor into the shape of the character you are playing. It allows you to exaggerate the grosser physical elements of a character and examine them objectively.

What research have you done to help you play the role of Azdak?

John Fuegi's book 'Bertolt Brecht - Chaos According To Plan' is very useful. Personally, I think Azdak follows in the tradition of the Holy Fool, or the Shakespearian clowns - a generally comic figure who undermines those in authority.

Do you think Azdak is motivated by an underlying sense of justice?

I think he discovers what he's been looking for when he encounters Grusha.

Practical Exercises

Narration

- In small groups, read through and discuss the excerpt below (Act 5, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*).
- Each group has the task of presenting the text in a different style, with one person presenting and the rest of the group advising. For example; in the style of an impartial BBC newsreader; a melodramatic Hollywood actor; a stand up comedian; an MP; a genuine friend...
- Present these, then discuss what impact the different styles have on the meaning of the text and what effect on the group as an audience?

(excerpt from Act 5, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*)

SINGER: *AND AFTER THAT EVENING AZDAK DISAPPEARED
AND WAS NOT SEEN AGAIN.*

*BUT THE PEOPLE OF GRUSINIA DID NOT FORGET HIM
FOR MANY A LONG YEAR THEY RECALLED
HIS TIME AS JUDGE
AS A GOLDEN AGE
OF JUSTICE.*

WELL, ALMOST.

(The DANCERS dance off. AZDAK has disappeared.)

*BUT YOU WHO'VE HEARD THE TALE
OF THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE
REMEMBER THE WISDOM OF THE AGES:
THAT EVERYTHING
BELONGS BY RIGHT TO THOSE WHO
CARE FOR IT:
CHILDREN TO THE MOTHERLY
SO THAT THE CHILDREN THRIVE.
HORSES TO GOOD HORSEMEN
SO THAT THE HORSES THRIVE
AND THE EARTH TO GOOD FARMERS
SO THAT THE EARTH.*

SCENE STUDIES

SCENE STUDY 1:

In small groups read the scene below (Act1, *The Noble Child*) when Simon and Grusha meet for the first time and discuss it considering the questions below:

- What are Grusha and Simon very first impressions of each other?
- Where have both the characters been just before they meet?
- Is Grusha offended or flattered that Simon has watched her at the river?
- What does Simon want from Grusha?
- How does he try to get what he wants?
- Has Brecht/Alaistair Beaton written a romantic scene here?

Now do a contemporary version of this scene, using your own language and modern context. Then go back to the original text and play the scene again.

Discuss how this exercise affected your understanding of the text: in terms of your understanding of the characters and how they feel, what they want and what their obstacles are in this scene.

Excerpt from Act1, *The Noble Child*

GRUSHA, with a bundle of big green leaves under her arm, tries to enter the palace.

SIMON: Not in church, darling? Bunking off, are we?

GRUSHA: I was all dressed and ready to go, but then I was told they were a goose short for the Easter banquet. So they sent me to fetch one. I know about geese, you see.

SIMON: They sent you for a goose? (Pretending to be suspicious) I'd better take a look at this goose of yours.

GRUSHA doesn't understand.

SIMON: You can't be too careful with the fair sex. They say 'I'm fetching a goose', and it turns out not to be a goose at all.

GRUSHA steps boldly up to him and shows him the goose.

GRUSHA: If that isn't a fifteen pound corn-fed goose, I'll eat its feathers.

SIMON: It's a queen among geese! That one'll be earmarked for the Governor himself. And the young lady was down at the river again, was she?

GRUSHA: Yes. At the poultry farm.

SIMON: Ah, yes, at the poultry farm. Down by the river. Not up by the willow trees, then?

GRUSHA: No, I only go up there when I have clothes to wash.

SOLIDER: (*Meaningfully*) Exactly.

GRUSHA: Exactly what?

SIMON: *(With a wink)* Exactly that.

GRUSHA: I'm not supposed to wash clothes up by the willows?

SIMON: *(With an exaggerated laugh)* 'I'm not supposed to wash clothes up by the willows?' That's good, that's very good.

GRUSHA: Soldier, I don't know what you mean. What's good about it?

SIMON: *(Slyly)* 'If everyone knew what everyone knows pretty young girls would be kept on their toes.'

GRUSHA: I've no idea what everyone know about the willows.

SIMON: Not even if there's some bushes on the other bank? And from behind those bushes you can see everything that happens when a certain person goes to 'wash clothes'?

GRUSHA: And what happens? Can't this soldier say what he means and be done with it?

SIMON: Something happens. During which maybe something can be seen.

GRUSHA: The soldier doesn't mean that I dip my toes in the water on a hot day? Because that's all that happens.

SIMON: Oh, more than that. More than just your toes.

GRUSHA: Well, my foot at the most.

SIMON: Your foot – and a bit more besides. *(Laughs loudly)*

GRUSHA: *(Angry)* Simon Khakhava. You should be ashamed of yourself. Hiding behind a bush on a hot day waiting for a girl to dangle her legs in the water. And probably with a few other soldiers for company. *(Runs away).*

SIMON: *(Calls after her)* No, I was alone! *(As the SINGER takes up his story, SIMON runs off after GRUSHA.)*



Peter Bankole

SCENE STUDIES

SCENE STUDY 2:

Select a section of the scene below (Act 5, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*) - the conclusion of the case to determine which mother Michael truly belongs to. Rehearse it with your group, decide on the area you want to perform in. Is it in the round? Proscenium? Traverse? What props/furniture are you going to use if any? You can change elements of the script if you wish. For example, you can repeat lines or have two actors play one part simultaneously, or physicalise rather than speak the text. What would you do if you were unable to speak and had to express everything with your body and with sounds? Imagine that you are mute and this is the only way you can let people know what you want. What if one person expresses what the character is feeling whilst the other speaks the lines and tries to deal with the situation? What happens if they have to try to control their inner self? Present it to the rest of your class.

Excerpt from Act 5, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

AZDAK: Plaintiff and defendant! The court has considered your case and has not formed a clear view as to who is the real mother of this child. My duty as judge is to choose a mother for the child. We will have a test. Shauva, get a stick of chalk. Draw a circle on the ground. (*Shauva does so*) Place the child in the circle. (*Shauva does so. The child smiles at GRUSHA*) Plaintiff and defendant. Stand each side of the circle. (*They do so*). Each of you take the child by the hand. The true mother will be the one who has the strength to pull the child out of the circle.

2nd LAWYER: (*Quickly*) Objection! Your Honour, it's not right that the fate of the child, and with it the fate of the vast Abashvili estates should be determined in such a dubious manner. And I would add: that girl's accustomed to physical labour. My client does not have the same physical strength.

AZDAK: She looks well fed to me. Pull! (*GRUSHA lets go and the GOVERNOR'S WIFE pulls the CHILD out of the circle. GRUSHA stands there dumbfounded.*)

1ST LAWYER: (*Congratulating the Governor's Wife*) What did I tell you? Blood will out.

AZDAK: (*To GRUSHA*) What's the matter with you? You didn't pull.

GRUSHA: I didn't hold on properly. (*Runs to Azdak*) Your Honour, I take back what I said about you. I beg you to forgive me. Let me at least keep the child till he's talking. He can still only say a few words.

AZDAK: Do not attempt to influence the court! I bet you only know twenty words yourself. All right, I'll do the test one more time, just to be on the safe side. Pull! (*The two WOMEN again take up their positions. Again GRUSHA lets the CHILD go.*)

GRUSHA: (*Despairingly*) I reared that child. Do you want me to tear him in two? I can't do it.

AZDAK: (*Stands up*) That's it. The court has decided who is the true mother. (*To GRUSHA*) Take your child and go. I advise you not to stay in town with him. (*To Gov's wife*) And you get lost before I send you down for fraud. The governor's land goes to the town and will be turned into a much needed children's playground. I hereby rule that it will be known as Azdak's Garden. (*The GOV'S WIFE faints and is taken away by the ADJUTANT. The LAWYERS have already gone. GRUSHA stands stock-still. SHAUVA leads the CHILD to her.*)

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Forum theatre

- In small groups, identify a key line in the play. For example: *'Terrible is the temptation to do good.'* (The Singer talks to Grusha as she is about to take the child in Act 1)
- Improvise a scene, with a central character, that conveys this problem – for example; being a witness at the scene of a crime.
- Rehearse the scene, aware of the protagonist's moment of choice.
- Each small group play their scene for the whole group. The leader ask the audience; what is happening? What does s/he want? How does s/he feel? What is the problem?
- Then play the scene again, this time the audience must shout out *'Stop!'*, when they see the protagonist do something they think s/she should do differently to change the outcome of their situation.
- The audience member should replace the original actor and show how they would deal with that moment differently. The other actors must respond truthfully as their characters would.
- The audience may also *'hot-seat'* any of the characters in the scene; asking them about their feelings, intentions and actions.
- Afterwards, the group may want to discuss or debate various topics that come out of these scenes.



Nick Asbury

WRITING A REVIEW

- Say what you saw
- Say what you think
- Reflect on your responses
- Write freely from the heart
- Don't worry about given theories
- Create your own theories
- Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
- Question that moment
- Find out what it says to you
- Say why it spoke to you

Consider:

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
- The set, the costumes, the style of the production
- The objects; the suitcases, the wardrobes, the dolls, the documents, the story books
- Themes
- THE CHARACTERS
- THE STORY
- THE ENDING...

(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)

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(New Age Xtra 23 Feb – 1 Mar 07)
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by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, (Methuen 1988)
- **Bertolt Brecht in America**
by James K Lyon, (Princeton University Press 1980)
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by Elizabeth Wright, (Routledge 1988)

Useful links

Google compendium of different sites including translations, biographies, essays, discussion forum etc.

http://www.google.com/Top/Arts/Literature/Authors/B/Brecht,_Bertolt/

The international Brecht Society website

<http://german.lss.wisc.edu/brecht/>

Theatre dictionary

<http://filmplus.org/thr/dic1.html>

HUAC hearing

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_\(1947-10-30\)_transcript](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_(1947-10-30)_transcript)

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