

# THE WAGES OF WAR

University Theatre mounts a timely production of Bertolt Brecht's political masterpiece *Mother Courage and Her Children*

**S**hock, horror! A three-and-a-half hour reminder about how we haven't changed much as a society in more than 300 years. My babysitter was none too happy, either, when I called to tell her I would be gone an hour later than expected, and no, "I don't have time to tell you how to work the TV again."

Thankfully, director Michael Najjar's take at University Theatre on Bertolt Brecht's politically charged masterpiece, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, rolls right along through the Thirty Years' War like a child-drawn wagon. This bolder and bawdier translation by none other than Tony Kushner had me giggling at dirty jokes and jabs at our country's current dilemma of "improper management."

The result is a densely dynamic denunciation of war and its countless implications. From social injustices and the evils of capitalism to a general lack of humanity, Brecht's masterwork challenges audiences to not only consider the casualties of war, but also the painfully uncomfortable question: What would you sacrifice in order to survive?

Now I may have, at one time in my life, run away from my sweet, cherub faced young child when a shady fireworks display tipped over and grinned patriotically at the two of us. As I saw it flash its fiery teeth at me, my instinct in that moment was not to protect my child — not at first — but to make a run for it. My point is that the inherent need to survive, particularly when suddenly threatened with peril, can make any decent person (and I do not claim to be one) cling to life no matter the price.

No price is heavier in this play than that of the inexorable Mother Courage (Penta Swanson), who spends her days trying (and failing) to keep her three children

— Elif (Cobey Smith), Swizz Cheese (Julian Steinberg) and Katrin (Madeline Williams) — out of trouble while she simultaneously and often hypocritically profits off the war from the back of her wagon: a looming object on the stage in nearly every scene. Even in the shadows between scenes, the silhouetted burden on four wheels weighs heavily on the conscience.

Characters like the colorful and resourceful Yvette (Noa Cohen), who is as spicy and modern as she is speckled red, help liven the general despair, backed with the melancholy cello (played by Nicole Long) of UO grad Daniel Daly's original score, which undoubtedly echoes the dissonance of war.

Likewise, the Cook (Christopher Marin Arreola) and the Chaplain (Dashaun Valentino-Vegas) serve as memorable characters whose passions erupt from a state of imposed degradation. Arreola's performance is especially loud — like good and angry loud!

*Mother Courage and Her Children* is a witty, albeit hopeless, tragedy (Swanson, in particular, runs the gamut of postures, from funny to cutthroat) that is at times downright cringe-worthy in its relevance to our current political climate. There is a tension in this play that strikes a chord within my own anxieties — one that perhaps most of us feel when turning on the news or reading the latest presidential twitter meltdown.

While the play itself often feels relentless (because it absolutely is), there is something to say for humanity's inherent desire to persevere.

*Mother Courage and Her Children* plays through March 17 at University of Oregon's Robinson Theatre; \$8-\$10, tickets at 541-346-4363 or <https://tickets.ugoregon.edu>.



PENTA SWANSON AND MADELINE WILLIAMS  
IN *MOTHER COURAGE*

## UNCOLONIZED

a short documentary film about a native family who decided never to enroll their two daughters into the public school system, choosing instead to homeschool them from birth.

Chris is Potawatomi and Chasity is Navajo. Their daughters Nathaney and Mimicah, ages 11 and 7 at the time of filming, carry both of their parents' lineages in their blood, but also in their way of being. The film takes a critical look at the historical experiences of native children inside of the US public education system, and brings clarity to the decision of this family to keep their daughters out of the public school system, and therefore keep them UNCOLONIZED.

**Tuesday  
March 13  
5:30pm  
Univ of Oregon  
Mckenzie 221**

*Family-friendly*



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Native Lit Prof. Kirby Brown, Asuo Senate

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by David Lindsay-Abaire  
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A wild ride over Niagara Falls in a barrel of laughs!

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