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ALERT TOP STORY

ON STAGE

On stage: 'Mother Courage' shines in attention to detail

NANCY STEELE BROKAW For The Pantagraph
Sep 29, 2022

"Mother Courage and Her Children" is on stage through Sunday at the Illinois State University Center for the Performing Arts Theatre.
PETE GUITHER, FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

NANCY STEELE BROKAW For The Pantagraph

"Mother Courage and Her Children," now playing at Illinois State University, is a richly layered adaption of Bertolt Brecht's statement against war and the inequalities that are both its cause and effect. It's meant, by design, to make you think more than to feel and to ask questions it does not answer.

Brecht is acknowledged as one of the great dramatists of the 20th century and he wrote "Mother Courage" in 1939, in Germany, as Fascism was on the rise. He set his play in the religious Thirty Years War that ravaged Europe in the 17th century. Under Director Sanhawich Meateanuwat, this production is both rooted in and transcends that time period. Alas, war and profiteering continue to thrive today and Meateanuwat sprinkles in anachronistic touches to remind us of that, like a purloined suitcase of COVID-19 supplies being sold from a wagon.

That wagon belongs to Mother Courage, played by Lori Adams, who takes on this Lear-sized role with wily grit and enough nuance to dare us to see her humanity. It's a star turn by a pro (Adams is the head of acting at ISU) and not to be missed.

War is hell but, nonetheless, for 12 years, Mother Courage drags her wagon around Europe, turning a profit where she can, and feeding off the energy of the battlefield. She sings and wheedles and bargains but, in the end, she cannot save her three doomed children.

"Mother Courage and Her Children" is on stage through Sunday at the Illinois State University Center for the Performing Arts Theatre.

PETE GUITHER, FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

Eilif (a blustery Julian Campos) is the oldest son who is drafted, promoted and ultimately executed. Swiss Cheese (a touchingly sincere Tan Pham) meets his end over a military cash box. Kattrbn is the youngest child. She's disfigured and mute, but thanks to a luminous performance by Meleah Willams, hers is the loudest voice.

Leela Watts, as Yvette, the hooker who makes good, is an absolute delight on stage. Aneesah Phillips as the chaplain and Ben Meenan as the cook also turn in solid performances.

"Mother Courage" is disjunctive by design. The show is divided into 12 scenes, detailed in projections that precede the scenes. Meateanuwat has them projected and read in 12 different languages (war is everywhere, after all), which is the sort of attention to detail that makes this show shine. He creates stage pictures that are

riveting and memorable, aided by a versatile set by Michael Mason and lighting by Joseph H. Chambers. Sound design and music composition by M. Anthony Reimer also enrich the show.

“Mother Courage,” at its most profound, asks why mothers, down through the centuries, continue to howl over their dead children, lost on the battlefield. It doesn’t answer the question, but you’ll be hard pressed not to think about why the answer continues to elude us.

IF YOU GO

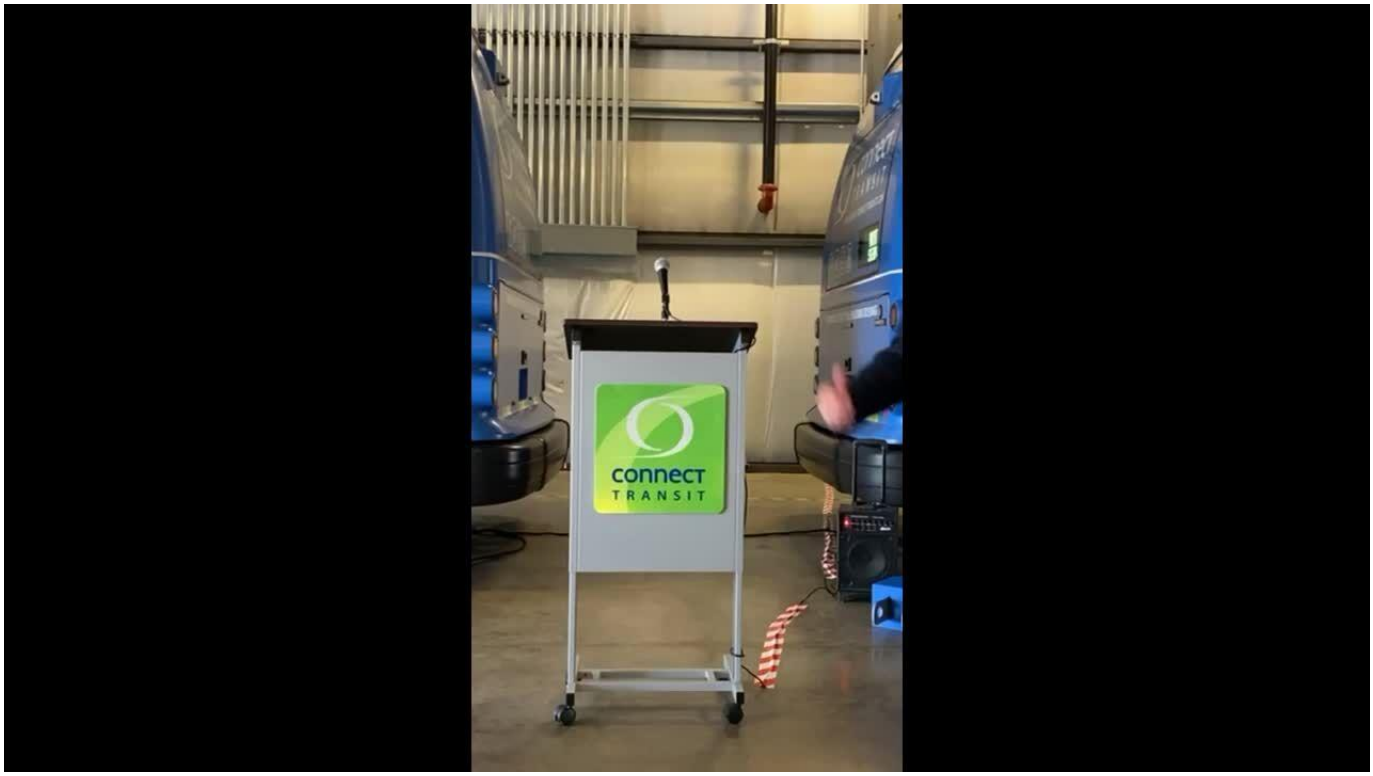
What: “Mother Courage and Her Children”

Where: ISU Center for the Performing Arts Theatre

When: Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.

Cost: $10-$15; call 309-438-2535

Running time: 2 hours and 30 minutes, with a 15-minute intermission



Congressman Rodney Davis, Bloomington and Normal officials and others gathered Tuesday to celebrate Connect Transit's electric bus and charging infrastructure.

Ladies who lunch: Photos from the ISO Guild Brunch

Debi Grossman, Fran Brandau, Mary Caisley, Joy Szmaj

Trevor Orthmann, Cathy Wentworth

Jan Wohlwend, Karen DeAngelis

Jan Wohlwend, Karen DeAngelis

Karen Timmerman, Lynda Straw, Hansa Jaggi, Angie Hoffman

Karen Timmerman, Lynda Straw, Hansa Jaggi, Angie Hoffman

New ISO assistant conductor Jake Woollen

Jake Woollen, Cathy Wentworth, Trevor Orthmann

Jake Woollen, Trevor Orthmann

Jake Woollen

Marilyn Mertz, Michael and Cheryl Whelan

Pat Grosso, Deb West

Analea and Anita Embree

Deena Coffman, Valerie Wyatt

Anita Carney, Marlene Gregor, Marilyn Blank

Anita Carney, Marlene Gregor, Marilyn Blank

Kristina Marshall, Elaine Cousins

Phyllis Schieber, Jan Harden

Toy Ackerman, Dottie Fleener

Cindy Ross-Ringer, Pat Grogg

Cindy Ross-Ringer, Pat Grogg

Fran Brandau, Jan Wohlwend

Debra Leighton, Anita Carney

Joan Vanden Eynden, Trevor Orthmann, Jackie Mitra, Terry Huff

Joan Vanden Eynden, Trevor Orthmann, Jackie Mitra, Terry Huff

Beth Wakefield, Mary Caisley

Beth Wakefield, Mary Caisley

Peggy Hundley, Debi Grossman, Lynda Lane

Deb West, Susan Palmer

Cathy Wentworth

Elaine Cousins

Cathy Wentworth with Julie Dobski showing her hostess gift

Cathy Wentworth, Trevor Orthmann

Cathy Wentworth receiving flowers from Trevor Orthmann

Nancy
Steele Brokaw

Nancy Steele Brokaw is a freelance writer who reviews plays for The Pantagraph.