

Theater

Theater review

Critic's Rating ★★☆☆

Caucasian Chalk Circle

Brecht in Long Island City.

Chocolate Factory Theater. By Bertolt Brecht. Dir. Alice Reagan. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 10mins. One intermission.

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BABE ALERT Jablin, right, protects a royal infant; Photograph: Yi Zhao

For a play about the chaos of war, the PL115 production of Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* is oddly reassuring. It's somehow exactly what it ought to be, populated as it is by talented young Columbia grads and wearing its director's recent apprenticeships boldly on its sleeve. And though there is still a whiff of the journeyman here, the company takes exacting care over every Kurt Weill—indebted song and joke. The show makes modest gains, but it does so with confidence and brio.

In the first half, while soldier Simon (Jeff Clarke) woos pink-faced Grusha (Rachel Jablin) in the middle of a vicious coup, nothing could be sweeter. When Grusha scoops up a baby—who has noble parents and the army hot on his diaper—the cast hops merrily across Peter Ksander's handsomely deconstructed set. The production has such zing and visual cohesion that costumer Asta Hostetter fashions a monk's headgear from a padded cooler and no one bats an eye. Sadly, after intermission, the humor broadens in a desperate effort to goose along Brecht's second plot (the rise of a corrupt judge). The judge doesn't wear pants! Ha.

Director Alice Reagan, hamstrung by the play's lopsided structure, excels more in theory than in execution. Choreographer Beth Kurkjian's dances aren't up to snuff, and despite some terrific banjo tunes by Mark Valadez, narrating chanteuse Rebecca Lingafelter falls just short. But luckily, we never forget Reagan's or the ensemble's thrilling potential: Not even two hours of Brecht could alienate us from them.—*Helen Shaw*

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