

Theatre department 'chalks' up a winner

By AUTUMN SCHRACK
Staff Writer

The Otterbein Theatre Department will be presenting "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" January 31-February 3 and February 7-9 at Cowan Hall.

This production is directed by Christina Kirk and will feature original music by Dennis Davenport, an Associate Professor of Music at Otterbein.

"The Caucasian Chalk Circle" was written by Bertolt Brecht at the end of World War II. It is believed to have been inspired by the Chinese play "Chalk Circle," which was written around 1300 C.E.

Set in the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia, it tells the story of a child claimed by two mothers and the struggle between the two to call him their own.

The story begins when the governor of a Caucasian city and his wife lose all of their power. The governor's wife, so focused on the money that they have, leaves their newborn baby behind in a hurry to get away from the approaching soldiers.

Grusha, a maid in the house, finds the baby and raises him as her own. In the spring, she is forced to marry a man who says that he is dying. However, it is discovered during the reception that the man said he was actually healthy.

Grusha was once engaged to Simon, a soldier fighting in the war. When Simon returns to find that she has married someone else, he is obviously upset. Throughout the rest of the story, their relationship is put to the test.

With the war over, the governor's wife returns to take back her child. The governor has died, and to receive her amount of his money, she must prove that the child is actually hers.

Grusha feels that she should be able to keep him since she has taken the most care of him.

A trial, which is presided over



PHOTOS BY GREG BEERS

FAMILY CIRCLE: *The play, opening today, tells the story two mothers struggling to claim the same child. Bertolt Brecht composed the play at the end of World War II.*

by a corrupt judge, is then set up to determine who will get the child.

Brecht was a very political writer, which is clearly seen through the power struggle between classes and the corruption of the judge.

Lauren Williams, a sophomore theater technology and design major and the assistant master painter for this play, says that it is a "unique show that is presented in a unique way."

The uniqueness of this play is that it is presented in the Brechtian style. This style of theater makes it clear that you are in theater by leaving all parts of the set exposed.

Williams says, "With Brechtian theater, you are constantly being reminded that you are watching a play so that you can think about the messages that the author and the director are trying to get across."

She also says that the story as a whole is not only engrossing, but also makes you think. She calls the love story between Grusha and Simon "interesting and well-developed."

Williams is most looking forward to hearing what the audience thinks about the show.

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THEATER

Continued from previous page

Chalk it up to inexperience

Bertolt Brecht believed theater's chief function was to inspire critical thought, not escapism. In Otterbein's hands, unfortunately, Brecht's **The Caucasian Chalk Circle** manages to inspire neither.

Directed by Christina Kirk, the 1944 musical is muddled by tacked-on scenes in which the German playwright himself (played by Cory Smith) argues with translator Eric Bentley (Elizabeth Shivener). For starters, they argue over Bentley's decision to leave out the play's prologue in order to shorten an already long play. Of course,

their arguments add enough length to make up for the deleted scene, so the audience is the loser twice over.

The plot, when we can find it in the midst of Otterbein's distracting additions, is divided into two parts and two central characters who eventually encounter one another.

The first protagonist is Grusha (Kari Ringer), a servant to the governor of a city in Azerbaijan some 1,000 years ago. When the governor is assassinated, she flees with his infant son, who has been abandoned by the leader's self-involved widow. After enduring cold, hunger and minor-key songs with no discernable melodies, Grusha makes it to her brother's house, where her troubles only multiply.

Eventually, Grusha's illegal adoption of



Brecht revisionists: Liz Shivener, Kari Ringer and Cory Smith (from left) in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

the young boy is questioned in the court of Azdak (Smith), a rascal who—as we learn in a lengthy flashback—has become a judge in the anarchy that followed the assassination. The resulting trial leads up to an ending that is actually rather effective, though it's not quite worth the tedious three hours that precede it.

There are several things worth praising in the production, including the acting and singing skills of the lead players and the musicianship of the orchestra. Even more praiseworthy, though, are Otterbein's faithful viewers, who watch misguided experiments like this one with the same patience and good humor that they bring to the college's more successful productions.

If the real-life Brecht had audiences like this, he was a lucky man.

Brecht play staged at Fritsche Theatre

Otterbein College Theatre production of Bertolt Brecht's "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" continues with shows Feb. 7-9 in the Fritsche Theatre in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St.

Directed by Chris Kirk, "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" is a parable inspired by the Chinese play, "Chalk Circle."

Written at the close of World War II, the story is set in the Caucasus Mountains of Russian Georgia, and retells the tale of King Solomon and a child claimed by two mothers.

Tickets are \$15 each and can be reserved by calling the Otterbein College box office at (614) 823-1109.

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The Caucasian Chalk Circle

OTTERBEIN COLLEGE: COWAN HALL,
30 S. GROVE ST., WESTERVILLE (614-823-
1109, WWW.OTTERBEIN.EDU/THEATRE)

» The director, Christina Kirk, has added a prologue to emphasize the anti-war themes in the student production of the Bertolt Brecht drama, which updates the story of King Solomon deciding the fate of a child claimed by two mothers.

SHOWTIMES » 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. Feb. 7-9

TICKETS » \$15



FILE PHOTO

In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, from left: Cory Smith, Liz Shivener and Kari Ringer



By Bertolt Brecht • Directed by Christina Kirk
January 31-February 3; February 7-9, 2008
Fritsche Theatre at Cowan Hall, 30 S Grove St., Westerville

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a parable inspired by the Chinese play *Chalk Circle*. Written at the close of World War II, the story is set in the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia, and retells the tale of King Solomon and a child claimed by two mothers. A chalk circle is metaphorically drawn around a society misdirected by its priorities. Brecht's statements about class are cloaked in the innocence of a fable that whispers insistently to the audience. This production will feature original music by Dennis Davenport, Associate Professor of Music.



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• by Bertolt Brecht • directed by Christina Kirk
• Jan. 31- Feb. 3, Feb. 7-9, 2008

Fritsche Theatre at Cowan Hall,
30 S Grove St., Westerville

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one woman's story.

In the first act, the servant Grusha rescues an infant left behind during a revolution by a fleeing noblewoman, and raises him as her own against great odds. The second act shows us the life of the irreverent judge Azdak, leading us to the convergence of the trial when the original mother and Grusha come before him.

The setting is barren. Rob Johnson's design utilizes moving stairs and platform filling an open stage and showing a back wall.

The tale is told through narration and

here a character that is so poignant, and because it is played so well, we care about her more than what's happening around her.

The beginning of the second act, where Brecht gets away from Grusha and tells us about Azdak, comes off as more a statement on the political. However, it's also a point at which our interest begins to fade, only to come back when Grusha appears for the trial.

Director Christina Kirk attempts to help connect this material to her audience by inserting Brecht and Bentley as characters, scenes with them stepping back and forth. This is interesting at first, but



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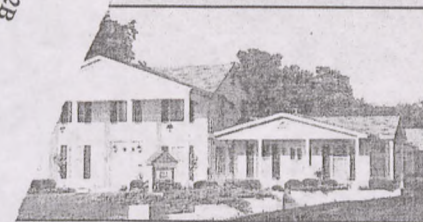
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NEWS & PUBLIC OPINION

February 6, 2008

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