



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Asteron present
a Malthouse Melbourne and Victorian Opera production of
Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

Text by Raimondo Cortese

Lyrics by Jeremy Sams



PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

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ABOUT STCED

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CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor – Richard Gill

Director – Michael Kantor

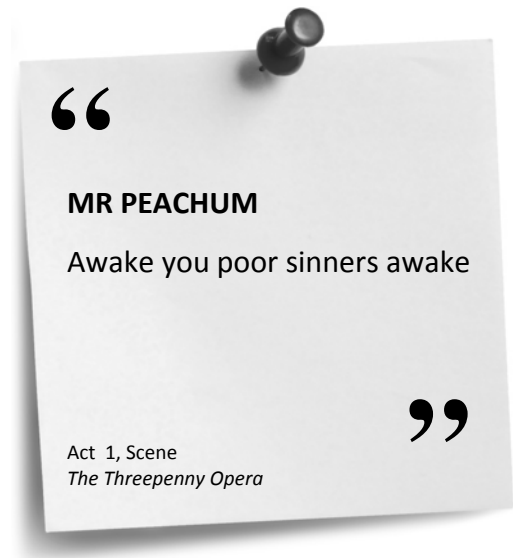
Set Designer – Peter Corrigan

Costume Designer – Anna Cordingley

Lighting Designer – Paul Jackson

Coreographer – Kate Denborough

Music performed live by Ensemble Weill



CAST

Macheath – Eddie Perfect

Mr Peachum – Grant Smith

Mrs Peachum – Amanda Muggleton

Polly Peachum – Lucy Maunder

Tiger Brown – Jolyon James

Lucy – Dimity Shepherd

Jenny/Arch Bishop Kimball – Paul Capsis

Filch/Ensemble – Luke Joslin

Suky/Ensemble – Angela Scundi

Ensemble – Johanna Allen, John

Xintavelonis

Swing – Michael Whalley

THEMES

Political Theatre

Adaptation

The Musical

Epic Theatre

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SYNOPSIS

On an empty Melbourne Street, a spotlight captures Jenny, singing about the crimes of her ex-lover, underworld gangster, Macheath ('Mac the Knife'). She tells us only the 'workers of the theatre' could create the show that is about to unfold, 'The Threepenny Opera'.

Morning breaks with Mr J Peachum's, 'the most heartless of bastards', wake up song to the city's beggars. Filch is Peachum's first customer of the day. Mr and Mrs Peachum, agree to clothe and provide Filch with a beggar's sign, all in exchange for a seventy per cent cut of his begging earnings. When their daughter, Polly, doesn't appear the Peachums' immediately suspect she's with the notorious Macheath.

Meanwhile Polly, is about to marry Mac in a St Kilda 'stable'. A mock, 'no certificate' wedding with Mac's gangster buddies, Jimmy and Mitch, is held. Arch Bishop Kimball, a 'hedonist Christian' joins in the festivities.

Tiger-Brown, 'the King of Russell Street', the city's head cop, also drops by to congratulate the new couple. An old buddy of Mac's, they reminisce about their old army days. They look after each other's 'professional interests' with Mac paying Brown off for information to maintain his criminal activity without police interference.

Polly's parents berate her for her unsavoury choice of husband. Polly argues Mac is a good business man, who 'picks and chooses who he rips off'. They demand she get a divorce. They promise to call upon Brown and have Mac arrested for his history of heinous crimes. Brown does a deal with the Peachums' to arrest Mac.

Polly tells Mac, Brown has sold him out. Gang members arrive to help Mac escape the city. He promises to return to Polly soon. The city is getting ready for the King's Coronation.

The Peachum's tell Jenny there is a reward for any information on Mac's whereabouts. Unaware of her betrayal Mac visits Jenny at the brothel where she works. Brown arrives and arrests Mac. Jenny celebrates his capture.

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Mac is furious with Brown, but Brown reassures him he has a plan to doublecross Peachum. He lets Mac go, who then goes to the Metropol Hotel, where he meets up with another one of his girlfriends, Brown's daughter, Lucy. Brown is unaware of her relationship with Mac.

Polly arrives at the hotel and a fight breaks out between the girls over Mac. Mac refuses to defend Polly and she is eventually dragged away by her mother. Lucy wants to run away with Mac but he says he'll come back for her later.

Peachum threatens to disrupt the King's coronation if Brown does not find Mac and arrest him. The Peachums enlist Filch to be a suicide bomber at the King's Coronation.

The next morning, Jenny arrives wanting her share of the reward for dobbing in Mac. They refuse to pay her because Mac has escaped. Furious, she lets slip that she knew of his escape and that he is now with another prostitute, Suky Tawdry. Peachum reneges and offers her cash or drugs. She accepts the drugs.

Peachum warns Brown that the new King will be assassinated if he doesn't arrest Mac. Brown succumbs to pressure and agrees to re-arrest Mac.

Lucy feigns she is pregnant, and plans to kill Polly by spiking her drink. Polly apologises to Lucy for her behaviour. Lucy gives her the drugged drink. But soon they are both fighting again. Polly pulls out the cushion under Lucy's dress and reveals her pregnancy lie. Polly is about to take the drink, when Mrs Peachum arrives to tell her Mac has been arrested.

Brown tells Mac he needs money to pay off the King, if he wants to be freed. Mac meets his men Jimmy and Mitch and demands they get the money to pay off the King & Brown. They reluctantly agree.

Polly visits Mac in prison. He asks her to help him by getting together all her financial assets. She offers to plead to the King personally on his behalf.

Brown announces the coronation has begun and reminds Mac his time is running out. Suky also visits Mac offering him sex but he's pre-occupied and refuses her offer.

Brown tells Mac his men have delivered the money under the watchful eye of his police officers and reassures him now the money has arrived, he soon will be free again. The Peachums, Polly, Jenny and Lucy arrive at the prison. Lucy apologises to Mac for her father's betrayal. Mac tells her, her father is 'a good man'.

Brown greets Mitch and Jimmy. They give him the suitcase. He inspects the money and then shoots them both. Taking the money he exits.

Mac with a noose around his neck, prepares to die. Singing to the audience he begs for forgiveness. Polly forgives him. Brown returns as royal messenger from the King. He announces that to mark his coronation Mac be set free. They all rejoice.

Filch pulls off his workers jacket and laughing, pulls the fuses on his suicide jacket. Everyone runs.

Consider

For Brecht, theatre can be realistic only to the extent that it contributes practically to solving the problems it represents.

Entertainment and instruction are in open conflict.

Is capitalism a crime?

The production is set in Melbourne, but it could be anywhere in the western world.

References:

Florian Nikolas Becker Capitalism and Crime: Brechtian Economies in *The Threepenny Opera and Love, Crime and Johannesburg*, Modern Drama, Vol 53, No 2, Summer 2010.

On Experimental Theatre, Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Willett.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

The Threepenny Opera was adapted by Brecht and Kurt Weill in 1928, from John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* 1728 .

Enjoying a period of economic recovery between 1925-1929, Germany had re-entered the world of global capitalism. During this period there was a flood of American goods into the German market. Brecht and the German Weimar generation held a fascination with American culture through their increasing access to American films, (Charlie Chaplin was Brecht's favourite), literature (cartoons, magazines) and music (Jazz).

Brecht and his peers recognized the potential for satire and parody in combining the opera genre—a representative of the highest, old-European culture—with the sights and sounds of America — 'the youngest, brashiest, and, by many standards, least cultured of nations'. Weill and Brecht's , *Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* were two of the many 'hybrid' operas produced that at the time exploited this bringing together of opposites.

The Threepenny Opera draws a relationship between crime and capitalism and represents essentially a Marxist view of capitalist economic structures. Brecht constructs a mythical version of the cut-throat world of Victorian London in order to critique capitalism. Capitalism and crime are understood to be inseparable.

All Brecht's works are driven by his Epic Theatre principles, in which everything represented on stage is designed to contribute to a public debate on how to solve the problem represented in the play. Brecht rejected Aristotle's concept of emotional catharsis and empathy and plot as a simple story with a beginning and end. Although Brecht rejected Aristotle he did uphold the Greek dramatists philosophy of the theatre as a public forum for moral and political debate.

His concept of the 'alienation effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*, or V-Effekt) was created through his use of poetic prose and non-linear structuring of events. By taking emotion out of the performance through the actors dissociating emotionally from their roles the performance is

made deliberately 'strange'. This strangeness contributes to both the actor and audience being made conscious of what is being enacted.

The Threepenny Opera was an instant success with German audiences. A musical film version was made in 1931, and Brecht wrote a novel adaptation in 1934. It is the most produced of all Brecht's works.

References

Joy Calico, *Brecht at the Opera (review)* The Opera Quarterly - Volume 25, Number 3-4, Summer-Autumn 2009, pp. 307-311

Florian Nikolas Becker, Capitalism and Crime: Brechtian Economies in *The Threepenny Opera and Love, Crime and Johannesburg*, Modern Drama, Vol 53, No 2, Summer 2010.

Additional Resources

Malthouse production 2010

Musical Director Richard Gill and Actor Eddie Perfect introducing the production.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvNDIN1Dirw>

Reviews of Malthouse production, 2010

Theatre critic and writer Alison Croggan gives insightful and detailed background on the Malthouse production, and background notes on Brecht's approach.



<http://theatrenotes.blogspot.com/2010/06/review-threepenny-opera.html>

Kurt Weill

Kurt Weill Foundation web site has detailed synopsis of play, songs and photographs of the original production. <http://www.kwf.org/>

Famous productions



Robert Wilson directs *Threepenny Opera* with the Berliner Ensemble

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4A_4lDu2qtU

Threepenny Opera on film

The Threepenny Opera, 1931, directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst.

Features Lotte Lenya, Kurt Weill's wife. The film was banned by the Nazis' and prints destroyed.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U83S2ITzPKI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec0clERjQ5A>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMWc4h77e2o&feature=related>

For a contemporary adaptation of the opening scene, see this animation piece.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l0onnUkPz4&feature=related>

The Beggar's Opera on film

The Beggar's Opera, 1953, directed by Peter Brook, featuring Lawrence Olivier.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2E7p59sRvQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExD1QqUrHF4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4kysymcT7Y>

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AIM: To examine Brecht's application of Epic Theatre principles in challenging Capitalism through a range of literary, visual and performative texts.

"Grab them by the balls and their hearts will follow."

Bertolt Brecht



Discuss this statement with reference to your understanding of Brecht's Epic theatre principles.

What makes you angry?



List three things that make you angry about the world you live in.

Write a four-line poem expanding on your thoughts and feelings about what makes you angry.

Read & Share your poems with the class.

Discuss the responses. What are the common elements? Differences?

Explore solutions to what actions might be taken in dealing with the source of your anger.

What conclusions can you draw from what young people feel angry about in your class, school and Australian society in general?



Extension

Research life in the Weimar Republic, 1918 – 1933.

What made Brecht angry about the society he was living in?

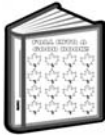
Call to Action

Brecht's works were essentially teaching plays, where he used the elements of theatre making and performance to deliver Marxist political ideology.

Brecht wanted to motivate his audience to think and to act. His plays were intended to be calls to action, provocations for people to think about long after they had left the theatre. Brecht's theatre aimed to shock and to provoke a response. He believed that theatre could be an instrument of revolutionary action.

Action Manifesto

Manifesto (Latin for 'struck by hand') is a public declaration, usually of political, religious, philosophical or literary principles and beliefs.



Refer to your 'Anger' poems.

Form groups with shared/similar themes of concern.

Write a Manifesto Action Plan outlining

-5 core beliefs & values

-5 actions to be undertaken

-5 strategies to ensure the success of your action plan.

Present to the class for discussion and feedback



Extension

Research the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1848.

Write a Theatre Manifesto

1. **List** everything you think is wrong with Australian Theatre.
2. **Brainstorm & Propose** solutions to all the identified problems.
3. **Devise strategies** you are going to implement to bring about the changes you want to see.

Brecht's photo-grams

The epigram (Greek for 'inscription') was a short statement that could be written in verse or prose. The epigram can be witty, ironic or sombre in tone and intent. This short form was a common feature of Brecht's poetry and dramatic text.



Research Brecht's 85 photo-epigrams in *War Primer* (1955)

http://21stcenturysocialism.com/article/brechts_war_primer_01137.html

Brecht's photo-grams were a photograph, usually cut out from the illustrated press (ie Life magazine), mounted on a black background and accompanied by a four line epigram.

For example, Photo-epigram #2, shows a photograph of US steelworkers accompanied by the text:

‘What’s that you’re making, brothers?’ ‘Iron waggons.’
‘And what about those great steel plates you’re lifting?’
‘They’re for the guns that blast the iron to pieces.’
‘And what’s it all for, brothers?’ ‘It’s our living.’



What social comment is Brecht making on the economic system the workers are participating in?



Choose an image from a magazine, newspaper or website.
Write a four-line epigram for the image that makes a political comment.
Mount the image on a black background, accompanied by the epigram.

Scan & Upload onto school website or Youtube

AND/OR

Exhibit as part of a school class/library display.

Put out a ‘Comments book’ for the audience/passers-by’s to write feedback on the exhibition.

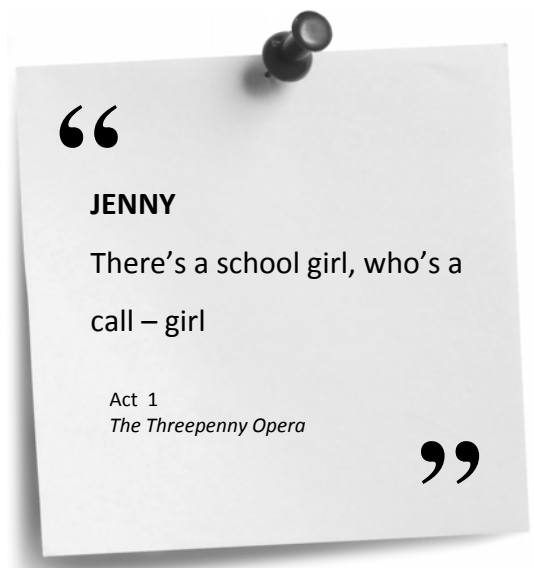
AND/OR



Create a group body sculpture based on one of the images.

Write the epigram on placards to be held by the performers (or displayed)

Develop the scene to include dialogue – the words on the placards might be spoken or remain as written text only.





AIM: To examine and explore music and song lyrics as political text.

On one point Brecht and I had always done battle, and did so again. Brecht was adamant that the public must clearly understand every single word. I argued that it was necessary only at points when the action moves on; everywhere else, one could rely on the singers' artistry, particularly since the music in any case takes over the text's function. Brecht was cross.

Dürrenmatt



Why is Brecht 'cross' with Swiss playwright, Fredrich Durrenmatt?

Why is it important that the words of the songs are understood and heard by the audience and not reliant on the singer's 'artistry' to carry them?

Brecht's Musical Legacy

Traditionally, when a prisoner 'sings', it means betrayal.

Feltham Sings

Watch *Feltham Sings, 2002*. A documentary film directed by Brain Hill.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6Koktwqnlc>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_fvOQbtzkw

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSpDkTpVg3U>

<http://www.centuryfilmsltd.com/feltham-sings.htm>

Documentary filmmaker, Brain Hill, poet Simon Armitage and composer Dexterous Robot work with a group of young male prisoners aged 17-21 using music and song to explore their personal stories of life and crime. The inmates told their stories and wrote the lyrics in collaboration with the artists and then performed them on camera. Prison staff also tell their stories and perform songs in the film.



Simon Armitage describes Brecht as his 'hero'.

What Brechtain influences can you see and hear in *Feltham Sings*?

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Consider

Performance Style

Common Man

Street 'tough' Language

Social Justice

Spoken Verse

Watch & Listen to Bob Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, 1965



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J4O2-nsFBA>

Dylan was strongly influenced by Brecht.

What features of this music film clip would you consider Brechtian?



Extension

Create/Storyboard & Film a music clip in the style of *Subterranean Homesick Blues* drawing on your 'Anger' poems OR photo-epigrams in the *Call to Action* resources.

Compose original music/soundtrack including key words/phrases of your epigram

OR use a pre-recorded track that fits the mood of your song's message.

Protest Songs

Brecht used music and song to interrupt the flow of the action. The songs were not meant to be decorative or illustrative but to give emphasis at particular moments in the play. The songs are wordy and provide characters opportunities to step outside the main action, make comment and tell their personal point of view. Brecht borrowed these stylistic devices from the Greek theatre's use of song and the chorus.



Research a form of music that has been associated with rebellion, protest and challenging the status quo.

Consider

Rap & Hip Hop

Rhythm & Blues

Grunge

National Anthems

Beatbox

Rock & Roll

Heavy Metal

Gospel

Punk

Folk

Choose a music genre to study.

Research the relevant social, economic and political environment

Choose one song or piece of music to analyse

Play & Listen to the music and lyrics

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How do the lyrics and style of music reflect the social and political circumstances of the period?

How is meaning conveyed in the song through the choice of words?

Give 3 examples of the words/phrases used to convey a political message or idea in the song.

+

Extension

Referring to the group body sculpture based on the photo-epigrams.

Develop the epigrams into song lyrics.

Explore singing and or intoning the lyrics.

Try different musical styles – country western, rap, opera, pop etc

Reflection

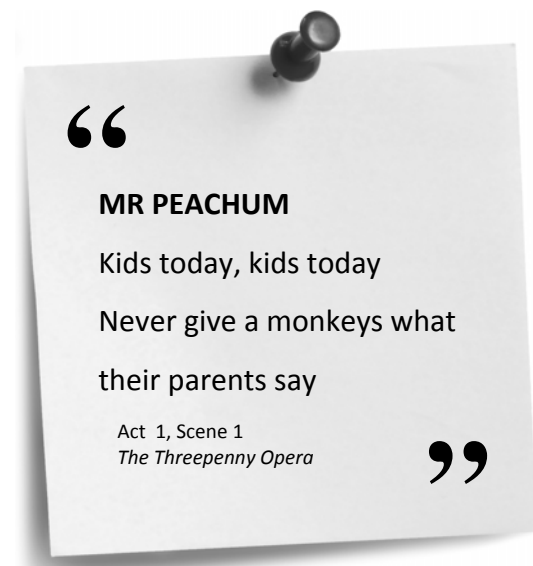
How does singing versus speaking the text effect the action and tone of the scene?

How do certain styles of music change, detract or give emphasis to the words of a song?

Performance Reflection

What is your favourite song in the production? Why?

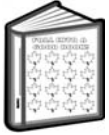
How did the dramatic elements shift and change to support the song?





AIM: To analyse how the genres of crime and gangster fiction are utilized in *The Threepenny Opera* to explore themes of corruption, capitalism and the law.

Crime as Drama



What is your favourite crime drama, story? Why?

List 5 key features of a good crime drama.

Why does crime make for popular drama?

From London, to Melbourne, the Malthouse theatre production was adapted by playwright, Raimondo Cortese and lyricist Jeremy Sims with the aim of 'honouring the original, while updating it to a modern audience'.

Melbourne has a long history of gangland violence between rival family groups which has involved many levels of the law and the community. The so called 'gangland war' between feuding groups began in 1998 and recently came to a symbolic end with the death of imprisoned crime boss, Carl Williams in 2010. The story was adapted into the television series, *Underbelly*. There have been two follow up series, dramatising Sydney crime stories in *Underbelly 2, 3 and 4*.

Why do you think the *Underbelly* series was so popular?



Research the Melbourne Gangland wars.

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/the-gangland-war-20100419-soql.html>

“

MACHEATH

When I am dead and gone
the world will carry on

Act 2, Scene 8
Threepenny Opera

”

Genre Rules

The Threepenny Opera combines genre elements of crime, gangster and the moral tale.

Key Features of Crime Fiction

1. The committing and solving of a crime
2. A study of the life of the criminal or criminals and the subculture they inhabit
3. Dramatises the nature of their destruction, which can be because they are caught, killed, become dead inside or isolated.
4. The protagonist's story is always tragic because they understand the value of things too late, or never

Key Features of Gangster Fiction

1. A struggle between a gangster and society with a criminal protagonist
2. Moral lesson to the audience
3. For the moral lesson to have weight the attraction of the gangster and their life must be explored as a warning to the audience
4. Includes sequences of: betrayal and switching loyalties, bloody-mindedness when things are doomed, saying goodbye to the world before you leave it.

The characters in *The Threepenny Opera* commit or are complicit in some form of crime either directly or indirectly.

In the rules of the traditional crime novel, the rule of law and crime are opposites. Brecht's method is to portray the relation between the bourgeois rule of law and crime as the same.



Research a true Australian crime story that involves themes of greed, corruption and the law.

What were the criminals motivated by? What happened to them?

Examine the socio-economic and political circumstances that lead to the characters on opposing sides of the law to commit or become victims of crime.



Devise/Write a 3 minute scene drawing on your research notes and based on the genre rules of crime and or gangster fiction outlined above.

Add a complication – one of the characters is motivated by love and loyalty.

Rehearse & Present



Extension

Brecht draws an analogy between crime and capitalism.

‘ There is no difference between owning a bank and robbing one.’

Brecht

Discuss this statement with reference to Brecht’s Marxist political ideology.

Performance Reflection

How effective was setting the play in Melbourne’s gangland culture?

Do you need to have been to Melbourne to understand the references to specific places, and sub-cultures?

References:

Stephen Cleary, *Genre Hybrids*, Arista Lecture Series, 2005



AIM: To examine the design elements and directorial concepts of the production.

Art and science work in quite different ways: agreed.
But, bad as it may sound, I have to admit that I cannot
get along as an artist without the use of one or two
sciences.

Brecht

While Brecht understood the need to entertain his theatre audience he also wanted them to think and to embrace the logic and technologies of science.

Which two sciences do you think Brecht can't get along without?



Research Brecht's designer Caspar Neher's 1928 production of *The Threepenny Opera*.

Collect & Compare images of Neher's production design with Peter Corrigan's design for this production.

How do the two designer's approaches reflect their different historical, social and cultural contexts?



The Boxing-Ring

What does the boxing ring represent?

How effective is the boxing ring design as a dramatic device? Does it contribute to the drama, detract from it, or have no influence at all?

How is the boxing ring setting consistent with Brecht's Epic Theatre principles?

Drawing on your research of Brecht's theatre what are the advantages and disadvantages of the boxing ring theatre design?

Cross-check the production's approach to set and lighting design, staging, costume and make-up elements against Brecht's list below.

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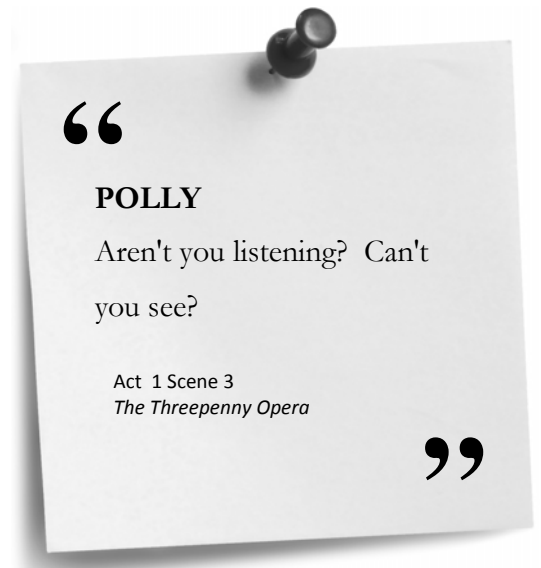
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Brecht's Epic Theatre Design Rules

- Stage should be brightly lit at all times so the audience know they are in a theatre and share the same world with the actors
- No fourth wall and no or only half a curtain to be used for the display of titles, captions or comments
- Set and costume changes in full view of the audience
- No special effects to create illusion or evoke emotional responses from the audience
- All light sources must be visible
- Placards may be used to make comments, give information or instructions to the actors or audience
- Set must be simple and suggestive not realistic with minimal props
- Music must have a visible source - musicians can be on the stage
- Interruptions for songs are announced or indicated by projection of a title or a sign
- Film or back projections can be used
- Make-up and costume must reflect social roles and not be decorative or too concerned with a natural appearance.



Adaptation & Location

The production has been adapted to meet the demands of a contemporary audience. The play is transported from its original time and place to contemporary Melbourne. The characters make a number of references to well known iconic locations in Melbourne:

Footscray

Smith Street (Collingwood)

Blyth Street (St Kilda)

St Kilda

Flemington

Bridge Road (Richmond)

St Patrick's Cathedral (East Melbourne)

Metropol Hotel

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Research these locations and then make a list of equivalent locations in Sydney.

Re-locate the play to Sydney - how would it be different, the same?



Design a set that would reflect a contemporary Sydney based location.

Collect images of real life places that would feature in your design.

Incorporate these images into your design/mood board.

Reflection

What are the limitations and advantages of adapting the play to a contemporary setting?

The Director's Concept



Brecht encouraged training directors to criticize his work.

Write down all the things you disagreed with in Michael Kantor's direction.

List 3 changes you would make if you were the director of The Threepenny Opera.

List 3 things you would keep from his production.



Extension

Discuss this review by Andrew Furhmann in *Curtain Call*, June 8, 2010

But director Michael Kantor's production fails the text.

Where Cortese and Sams offer brutality and specificity, Kantor fudges things with a murky sort of half-burlesque.

The set is a giant three-part Reg Mombassa-type blob on wheels. The costumes are a camp farrago of dress-up

randoms. The manners are inexplicably reductive and do

nothing but dull the effect of the text. Why, for instance,

do Macheath's gang dance about like monkeys and animals?

What could justify such distraction?



Read the whole article

<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/curtaincall/2010/06/08/review-the-threepenny-opera-malthouse-theatre/>



Write a response to the journalist's review. Do you agree or disagree?



AIM: To examine and analyse the role and function of Macheath as the anti-hero in *The Threepenny Opera*.

The Anti-Hero

The anti-hero is a non-hero or the antithesis of a hero of the old-fashioned kind who was capable of heroic deeds, who was dashing, strong, brave and resourceful. An anti-hero is incompetent, unlucky, tactless, clumsy, cack-handed, stupid, buffoonish.

J A Cuddon



Name some popular 'anti-hero', 'bad girls' and or 'bad guys' from literature, film, television, and other forms of popular culture.

Discuss why anti-heros often appeal to audiences?



List 5 aspects of Macheath's character that make him an anti-hero.

Debate with reference to Brecht's political agenda.

'Macheath is not bad he's just misunderstood'.

OR

'Macbeth is not the real villain of The Threepenny Opera'.



Write a short piece from Macheath's point of view.

Tell your life story from childhood up to the beginning of the play before Pirate Jenny gives the audience a damning assessment of your character.



Explore how and why you became a criminal.

Present as a monologue

OR

Compose/Perform as a song or poem

“

MACHEATH

You pardon me and I'll
pardon you

Act 2, Scene 8
The Threepenny Opera

”

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Macheath's Fall

Macheath sees himself as a victim of fate and attributes destiny as the cause of his fall.

MACHEATH: Salvation! Salvation!

Yes this had to be
Ah, my destiny
Trial and tribulation
Paved the way to salvation
Out of desolation
Shone the light of liberation

How much of Macheath's fall can be attributed to his own actions and how much to his social circumstances?



Write a short piece from Brecht's point of view.

Tell us your rationale in creating the character of Macheath. Who did he represent in 1930's German society? How is he still relevant to a contemporary audience?

Character & Genre



Drawing on the pre-production notes on the genre rules of crime and gangster fiction

Compare & Contrast how the character of Macheath (and other characters from the play) follows these genres conventions.

For example, examine Macheath's last speech within the context of 'The protagonist's story is always tragic because they understand the value of things too late, or never'.

MACHEATH: We don't want to keep anyone waiting. Ladies and gentlemen.

You're looking at an extinct representative of an extinct species.

We ordinary tradesman who work with honest crowbars on the cash registers of small business, are being swallowed up by the big corporations, with the banks standing right behind them. What's a skeleton key compared with the share certificate?

What's knocking off a bank compared with interest on a loan?

What's thieving for money compared with working for money?
Citizens, it's time to leave. Thanks for seeing me off. Some of
you have been very close to me. I'm still shocked that Jenny
squealed on me. It just shows you that nothing ever changes.
Several unlucky circumstances have joined together to bring
about my fall. So, I fall.

+

Extension

Discuss Macheath's final address to the audience and his arguments in justifying small-time crime and small-scale business versus large-scale crime as represented by big business and the banks.

References:

J A Cuddon Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory. London, Penguin, 1998



AIM: To understand and critique Brecht's use of character for didactic purposes.

Character is never used as a source of motivation;
the inner life of the persons never supplies the principal
cause of the plot and seldom is its main result.

Bertolt Brecht, *Versuche*, "Der Dreigroschenprozess,"



Discuss Brecht's statement with reference to his theory that the character and the actor playing the character must primarily serve his Marxist principles.

Brecht's Reported Speech Exercise

Brecht wanted his actors to maintain an emotional distance from their characters and to always understand they were playing social roles in adherence to a political agenda. One of his training and rehearsal strategies was to have the actors speak their roles in third person. Dialogue, spoken in performance in the present tense, becomes reported speech.

For example,

FLICH: Is this Peachum & Co?

becomes: He asked whether this was Peachum & Co.

PEACHUM: Why?

becomes: He asks why are you asking?

FLICH: I was told to come and see you. I have heard you got a whole library full of slogans.

becomes: He tells Peachum he has come to see him. He says he has heard Peachum has a library full of slogans.



Complete the rest of the scene excerpt, translating the spoken dialogue into reported speech. Include stage directions as well.

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

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PEACHUM: ...and?

FLICH: Thing is Mr Peachum, I've had an ugly streak of luck since I was a kid. My mum was a drunken ho, dad gambled every cent we had, belted black and blue since the day I was born.

PEACHUM: Terrible.

FLICH: Well I worked hard and kept my head down. Found my way through. Got a job, wife, kids. But then the landlord hiked up the rent and hiked us out. Bank retrenched me, now we're living in the gutter, cardboard for blankets and the toffs just spit at us. The little one's crying for milk. Anyway, that's why I'm here. (Silence) I'm telling you I got nothing.

PEACHUM: I heard.

These “practice scenes” were meant to cast new light on the dialogue scenes.



Compare & Contrast the spoken (dialogue to be performed) and reported versions of the scenes.

How does the third person version feel to play?

Do you feel more or less emotionally connected to the scene? Why?

Emotion vs Reason

Brecht supposed these two, reason and empathy, to be mutually exclusive. Yet in Greek tragedy or the plays of Shakespeare both are active. The problem is not empathy as such, but the degree and kind of empathy aroused.

Qaisar Iqbal Janjua



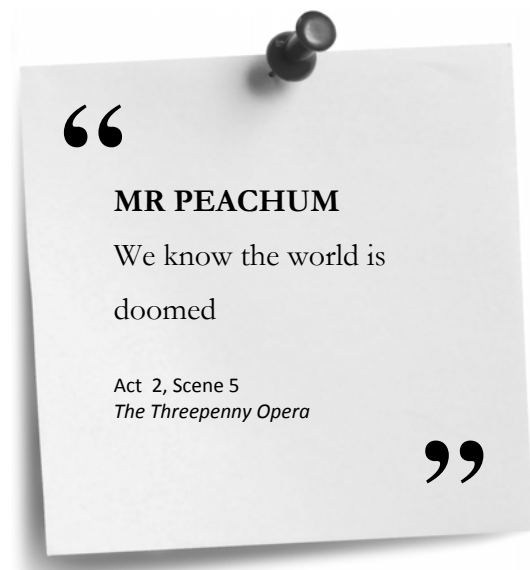
Debate Brecht's rejection of naturalistic theatre as arousing excessive emotion and ignoring reason. Do you agree or disagree?

Reflection

What were the strongest emotional moments in *The Threepenny Opera* performance?

What were the 3 most important messages you've taken away from this production?

References: *Bertolt Brecht's The Life Of Galelio*, A Critical Analysis by Qaisar Iqbal Janjua, 2010





AIM: To be able to respond critically and creatively to Brecht's representation of social relationships.

The Peachum's represent Brecht's loathing of small-time 'petty bourgeoisie' business.



Who does Polly represent in the play?

Why are the Peachums openly hostile to their daughter?

What is Brecht's intention in portraying the Peachums as not only unscrupulous business people but also uncaring and unloving parents?

“JENNY

These may seem like scary stories

But don't have nightmares or be upset...

Prologue
The Threepenny Opera

”

The Peachums complain about the youth of today in 'The Either This Or That Song'

PEACHUM: Kids today, kids today

Never give a monkeys what their parents say
They prefer love, they prefer love
Busy misbehaving stead of saving for a rainy day

MRS PEACHUM: They love the Moon over St Kilda

They go for that "this is my heart beating" stuff
They fall for that "I will be yours for eternity" bullshit
And a good honest job isn't good enough

PEACHUM: Moons in June, Mills & Boon

Doodling and canoodling every afternoon.
Children today! What can we say?
Someone didn't bring 'em up the proper way.

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

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A right of reply is the right to defend one self against public criticism.

Write a 'Right of Reply' to the Peachums' argument's against kids from Polly's point of view.

Complete the lines

POLLY: Parents today, parents today

.....

.....

.....



Extension

Write a duet in which two opposing social, political or economic groups argue their case against each other:

- politicians & voters
- boys & girls
- employees & employers
- teachers & students
- environmentalists & industrialists
- conservatives & liberals
- climate change believers & climate change sceptics

