



February 1989

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

by Bertolt Brecht

LOFT THEATRE
VICTORIA COLONNADE

LEAMINGTON SPA
LEAMINGTON SPA 26341

1st - 11th February 1989

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

by Bertolt Brecht
Music by Joe Griffiths

HELEN ASHBOURNE..... Natella Abashvili, Aniko
 TOM ATKINSON..... Laurenti, Shauva
 SCOTT BUTCHER..... Simon Shasharva, The Nephew
 VANESSA COMER..... Grusha
 LORRAINE CRANTON..... The Nurse, Ludovica
 ANITA DAWSON..... The Doctor, The Architect, The Lawyer
 JOHN FENNER..... The Adjutant, The Corporal, The Sickman
 BILLY HAMILTON..... Prince Kazbeki, The Monk
 JEREMY HEYNES..... George Abashvili, Azdak
 WILL JOHNSTONE..... Ironshirt
 DERMOT LEE-BAKER..... The Doctor, The Architect, The Lawyer
 JUDITH PORTER..... The Mother-in-Law, Granny Grusinia
 TIM WHITCOMBE..... Ironshirt, Blockhead

Other roles played by members of the company.

MICHAEL will be played by.....Claire Burman
Kate Hewitt, Lucy Hill, Luke James, Kathryn Meyrick, Victoria Smith,
Guy Voce, Lara Voce, Abby Williams, Michelle Witherington.

Directed by..... David Fletcher
 Music Director..... Max Warner
 Lighting Designer..... William Wilkinson
 Simon Butcher
 Wardrobe Mistress..... Wyn Heather
 Property Mistress..... Joyce Hall
 Margaret Rees, Collet Towns
 Stage Carpenter..... David Bradley
 Barbara Crisswell
 Stage Management..... Gill Hollowood
 Penny Otewill

The play is in two acts with one 15 minute interval
We would like to thank Liddingtons Wine Merchants, for the use of the crates

Loft gets its act together

THOUGH slightly disjointed at first, Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* at the Loft Theatre, Leamington, this week, developed into a dramatic and captivating production belying its amateur status.

Revolt in a feudal land sees servant girl Grusha flee to the mountains with the deposed governor's baby son, abandoned in the panic by his mother. Natella Abashvili returns to claim her child but finds Grusha unwilling to relinquish him. The two undergo trial at the hands of an unorthodox judge, Azdak, to establish who is the rightful mother.

Ultimately, good triumphs over evil with Azdak briefly presiding over a court where, despite corrupt administration, the

poor have justice. The play's opening sequences lacked continuity with its stream of characters appearing and reappearing, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of Paddington Station rather than feudal Grusinia.

However, director David Fletcher's "ensemble" approach, with actors playing several rôles, developed into an extremely effective play demonstrating the considerable skill and versatility of the cast.

Jeremy Heynes was excellent as both the

corrupt governor (George Abashvili) and revolutionary judge (Azdak), while Helen Ashbourne gave a masterly portrayal of cruel, callous Natella Abashvili. In antithesis was Grusha, kind, caring, and sympathetically played by Vanessa Comer.

The entire cast gave impressive performances in their different guises, thrown into relief by the simple but effective set.

This lively and entertaining production comes to an end tomorrow (Saturday) and is certainly worth a visit. **ADRIANNE EMES**

Simple, pure and worth a go!

Caucasian Chalk Circle — Loft Theatre
BRECHT is not a crowd-puller. But the Loft has taken a gamble with him and it deserves to pay off.

When Brecht is taught in schools it can put you off him for life, and when he is not on the English syllabus there is no reason to come across him.

So why take the trouble to go to the Loft? Because it is good.

"The Caucasian Chalk

Circle" is one of Brecht's easiest plays. The social messages are spread with a more delicate hand than in some, but that does not make it any less powerful.

On a sparse set, which excellently matches the mood, a group of actors unfold the tale of a natural mother and an adopted mother and the events which lead up to the test of the chalk circle. Who is the true mother?

The actors slip in and out of roles weaving the threads of the story into the material for the final scene.

Out of the well-directed cast, Jeremy Heynes as Azdak and Vanessa Comer as Grusha need special mention. Both performed difficult parts with skill, although I refuse to believe that Grusha was not very bright. A point that Brecht labours and then contradicts in his writing of the part.

The second half beats the first hands down, but at no point does it become dull.

Light moments are few and far between and to a public soaked in sitcoms, that may not seem attractive, but give it a go.

It is not a show that makes you laugh. It is unlikely to make you cry. But its simplicity and purity make it worthy of greater attention than it is likely to receive. **RC**

Evening Telegraph, Thursday, February 2, 1989 19

Parable with a twist of Brecht



A scene from the Loft production with (from left) Tim Whitcombe, John Fennel and Will Johnson

THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE, Loft Theatre, Leamington. Running time: 2 hr 30 min.

GOOD clashes with evil, the poor triumph over the rich and a deserving mother gets an orphan.

Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* is a parable up there with the best of them.

In war-torn Caucasia, the Ironshirts are the strong arm of the law and the poor peasants are the victims. But the rich baddies end up down at heel as a new sense of justice prevails and

First Night Verdict —

the countrymen rejoice.

At the centre of all this is the ancient Chinese parable of the chalk circle — with a typical Brechtian 20th century twist.

The political overtones are obvious but, above all, this folk tale is good, solid entertainment.

The Loft cast presents a polished, well-paced performance, changing hats numerous times with professional ease.

Simple songs and language, as well as the presence of a narrator, brings the piece alive and gives emphasis to the play's folkloric aspect.

A rogue judge, called Azdak, played excellently by Jeremy Heynes, is the man of the play.

This boozy, everyman's judge knows what is right and restores order to the land.

The production, coupled with fine performances in the excellent surroundings of the Loft, ranks it well above amateur status. **Allison Brace**

