



WHITGIFT

THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

*By Bertolt Brecht, in a new
translation by Alistair Beaton*

7–9 December
7pm | Big School

With original music by Josiah Chamberlain, additional songs by James Spence | Photography by Alex Hill



THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Bertolt Brecht wrote *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1944, as the world was tearing itself apart in the greatest military conflict it had yet known. He was living in America, an early exile from the murderous Nazi regime, and urgently seeking for hope. This play is an embodiment of that hope, a powerful call for a new system of organising the world in a more compassionate way, where characters such as Grusha are celebrated, and not oppressed by war and injustice. 2022 felt like the perfect time for Whitgift to attempt this inarguable classic of 20th Century theatre. Outside our walls the world seems to be dark and getting darker. War rumbles on in the east, people fleeing conflict and deprivation arrive perilously on our shores, and our own lives are becoming harder and harder. Meanwhile, our leaders survive six weeks, or leave in disgrace, and we are left struggling to envision a more hopeful tomorrow. At its best, theatre is a communal effort to do just this. As Gurpeet Kaur Bhatti has it, playwrights “tell us [that] life is ferocious and terrifying, that we are imperfect, and only when we face our imperfections truthfully can we have hope.” This play’s hope is Grusha, the servant girl who picks up an abandoned child and selflessly protects him through the trauma of

dislocation and war. Her story has rarely seemed more relevant, or her challenge to us, more needed.

Brecht’s dialectical theatre has also influenced many of the medium’s most brilliant practitioners. Most significantly, in rejecting the illusion of reality for a clearly presentational style, Brecht returned theatre to a place where performer and audience member look each other in the face and share a collective act of creation. Combining his mischievous irreverence, influenced by the cabaret of the Weimar Republic, and his ardent desire for societal change, Brecht’s plays should be both a riotous evening in the theatre, and a cause for debate, discussion and action afterwards. I hope that we will live up to this lofty ambition, and that you will enjoy sharing the experience of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* with this excellent company, who have taken on this truly epic tale with good humour and dedication.

It has been a real pleasure to work with them, the excellent band, and the creative team to bring *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to Big School.

JC Hammond
Director of Drama

MR CRESSWELL ON BRECHT

Ethan Hamilton (Lower Sixth) spoke to D J Cresswell (Senior Deputy Head) in the build-up to the production to learn about the breadth of knowledge he has on the playwright of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*; Bertolt Brecht. I wanted to understand how Brecht achieved his influence in theatre, and the techniques he used to create such thought-provoking shows.

Where did you first discover Brecht and his work?

As a drama scholar at school and a German A-level student, combined with my love for Theatre and German, I discovered Brecht. Then through my studies of Modern Languages at University, where I majored in 20th century German Theatre, Brecht became a huge part of what I studied. As I learnt more about Brecht, I became fascinated by the techniques he used, the way he created his theatrical pieces and the way he presented his creations for the theatrical stage.

What should be people know about the influence of Brecht?

For people who don't know that much about his plays, it's important to give



a sense of who Brecht was. He was a Marxist in the true sense of the word, not necessarily aligning with communism, but he strongly believed in Marxist philosophy. He lived through the Weimar Republic which sparked his ideas during the 1910's/20's to create some thought-provoking theatre.

What aspects of Brecht's theatre made you so interested in it?

Brecht was an agent-provocateur. He invited you to the theatre, but instead of you sitting there comfortably watching a show like *Romeo and Juliet*, which wraps you up in emotion, he would poke you with different theatrical devices to make you realise that you are in a theatre and not just watching a story being portrayed

by actors. I like how Brecht would avoid using a traditional Proscenium Arch stage. Instead, he would have his plays In-the-round or Traverse, so the audience could see each other and are then able to react to the emotions they see being shown by other audience members. The thing I most enjoy about Brecht's theatre is the way in which he constantly encourages the audience to think and make up their own moral judgments on the story he is showing. One of my favourite Brecht sayings concerns his desire not to have theatre audiences "hang up their brains with their hats in the cloakroom". This perfectly describes the way he wanted to contrast himself from naturalistic playwrights of the time that we are all so used to seeing.

What aspects of Brecht's theatre do you want to see shown in our production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle?

I want the audience to be on the edge of their seats. I want them to be fully aware that they are watching a play so that their brain is turned on, not off. Which is exactly how Brecht wanted his audiences to feel; he didn't want them to be lulled into a false sense of security, where they

sit quietly watching actors portray a story. I want the audience to know the setup of the play so that they are constantly aware that it's not naturalistic and that what you're watching isn't real life. By having the play in Traverse, I want the audience to be able to see each other and therefore trigger emotion based on the reaction they see between one another, which is a key aspect of how Brecht would setup his plays. The final aspect of Brecht's theatre which I want to see portrayed in our production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is the audience engagement. I want the audience to make up their own moral judgements and decide how they think the play should end.



THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

CAST

<i>Grusha</i>	Lucía Mayorga
<i>Azdak</i>	Ethan Hamilton
<i>Kazbeki</i>	Rafi Davis
<i>Georgi Abashvili</i>	Matthew Lee
<i>Governor's Wife</i>	Sumaiya Bangura
<i>Simon</i>	Nifemi Bankole
<i>Jussup</i>	Fraser Murray
<i>Jussup's Mother</i>	Elsa Clements
<i>Shauva</i>	Luke Ward
<i>Lavrenti Vachnadze</i>	Milo Weaver
<i>Kazbeki's Nephew</i>	Tom Bennett
<i>Puppeteer (Michael)</i>	Joe Hill
<i>Puppeteer (Michael)</i>	Oliver Richard
<i>Expert</i>	Alex Braglewicz
<i>First Man</i>	Felix Warren
<i>Younger Lady</i>	Zino Esiefiho
<i>First Woman</i>	Arianna Mohammadi
<i>Second Woman</i>	Amira Gill
<i>First Young Man</i>	Nick Seal
<i>Old Farmer</i>	Joel Gulliford
<i>Woman</i>	Nishita Dhiwar
<i>First Doctor</i>	Bakari Leon
<i>Second Doctor</i>	Jay Raymond
<i>Old Woman</i>	Sanjana Sriram
<i>Maro</i>	Adjoa Abboah-Offei
<i>Old Farmer Wife</i>	Caitlin Clifford
<i>Young Woman</i>	Janice Egbebu
<i>First Lawyer</i>	Milo Moffitt
<i>Servant</i>	Evie Constantinou
<i>Farmers Wife</i>	Tilly Lewis
<i>Second Young Man</i>	Aamir Hatimi
<i>Old Man</i>	Ben Lewis
<i>Aniko</i>	Nissi Ofoborh

<i>Architect</i>	Thomas Lofthouse
<i>Soldier</i>	Otto Monge
<i>Soldier</i>	Azam Syed
<i>Soldier</i>	Yoshua Akhtar

BAND

<i>Singer</i>	Gibran Ahmed
<i>Drums</i>	Samuel Burke
<i>Lead Guitar</i>	Patrick Thompson
<i>Keys</i>	Joss Hourigan
<i>Rhythm Guitar</i>	Miles Coppin
<i>Bass Guitar</i>	Tanmay Agarwal

All other characters are played by the members of the company.

CREATIVE TEAM

<i>Director</i>	JC Hammond
<i>Producer</i>	E Jupp
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	D Jenkinson
<i>Sound Engineer</i>	Y Dudnyk
<i>Scenic Automation</i>	A Hill
<i>Puppet Maker</i>	EO Spedding
<i>Musical Consultant</i>	J Chamberlain
<i>Stage Managers</i>	Sam Parker & Phoebe La
<i>Props, Costumes & Make up</i>	Benetta Biokoro, Summayyah Boulter, Harnitha Umashankar, Saambavee Comaren, Dilkushi Gunaratne, Amrina Mirdjanova, Omolara Ola, Skye Wavamunno, Nishita Dhiwar, Jeevikkaa Thayalan & Ria Neerohoo
<i>Technical Backstage Support</i>	Oscar Robinson, Feran Oguntokun, Obade Ayedun



REFUGEES AND THEATRE

As of June 2015, there were over 50 million refugees in the world. The only time this has ever been greater was after World War 2. Theatre is a place of stories; it is a place of stories that need to be told and voices that need to be heard. So, in times such as these there has never been so many stories of refugees that need to be told, and it's crucial that people who have a platform, or a stage, to do so. Many theatre organisations around the world are working to do this now, Good Chance Theatre are a company that tells the stories of refugees worldwide. One of their projects 'The Jungle', a production about nationality, community, and identity, is a pertinent play that shares the stories of loss, hope and fear from the resilient residents of Europe's largest refugee camp. 'The Jungle' was put on at the Playhouse theatre in 2018. Another play put on at The National Theatre was 'The Boy with Two Hearts', a story similar to ours, about a mother who speaks out against the Taliban and how her and her two sons fled from their home country across all of Europe to seek refuge in the UK.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a story of a mother who out of fear, not only of her own death but of her child's, must run from her home through hills and rivers to try and find safety. It is a piece from Brecht showing not only the cruelty and hardship that so many refugees are faced with in the world but expresses the love and compassion that keeps them going.

Alex Braglewicz
Lower Sixth Form



THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

*'When the sharks
the sharks devour*

*Little fishes have
their hour'*



THANKS...

Mounting a theatrical production in such a busy school requires the help and goodwill of a great number of people. We would like to thank: the Headmaster and the Governors for their support; subject teachers for their patience and good faith in helping the performers to

balance their studies with rehearsals; Samantha Vary for sending letters and organising the calendar; the marketing team for advertising the show and Graham Maudsley for designing the poster and programme; the catering team for providing dinners during show week and for organising

interval refreshments; Christine Pennicott for managing the box office; the cleaning staff for cleaning up after long rehearsals, and, finally, the parents of the cast for supporting their children to attend rehearsals, learn lines and commit to what has been a quick and intense process.





WHITGIFT

Forthcoming Events

8-10 February 2023

SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS

7pm PAC

22-24 March 2023

Fourth Form & Fifth Form Play

7pm PAC

21-23 June 2023

FEATHERS IN THE SNOW

7pm Big School

www.whitgift.co.uk/events

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