

- Fear and Misery of the Third Reich By **Susan Elkin**
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Fear and Misery of the Third Reich

An episodic piece - originally 24 scenes and reduced here to 13 - Fear and Misery was Brecht's first openly anti-Nazi work. Deeply disturbing but laced with macabre comedy, it shows how 'ordinary' German life under the Nazis was permeated by defiance, secrecy, suspicion, anxiety, denial, violence, fear and dread.

As well as introducing GCSE and A level students to Brechtian methodology, it allows actors showcase-type opportunities to demonstrate versatility and Scene Production's cast of four rises well to the challenge with excellent voice work.

Kelly Taylor, for example, gives a bravura performance in her role as the Jewish wife, with telling facial gestures as she phones friends and addresses her Aryan husband first in his absence and then directly with passion, anger and fear. In other sketches, she makes a first-rate job of a knowing, wheedling child member of Hitler Youth and an hilarious but tragic elderly woman shaking squeakily with age.

Ryan Scott is very convincing as a child who may or may not have reported his parents for subversion, as a coarse, comic Nazi guard and in other roles tense, quiet, measured and self-deluding by turns. Katharine Hurst is another fine actor, especially in her manic role as a mother fearing betrayal by her son, in which she and Joe Toakley chillingly combine hilarity with horror. Toakley, too, is a strong actor. His cornet playing adds poignancy and his quick, adept shifts from quiet, sensitive roles to terrifying Nazi ones make good theatre.

This slick production with its simple set, audience inclusivity and visible stage management certainly leaves the audience with much to think about. The A level theatre studies and GCSE drama students I watched it with were riveted.

Production information

Darrick Wood School, Bromley, September 17 then touring schools until May 8, 2008

Author:

Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Willett

Director:

Ron Price

Producer:

Scene Productions

Cast:

Katharine Hurst, Kelly Taylor, Joe Toakley, Ryan Scott