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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

"Moeder Courage" at Wiener Festwochen 2025

Wiener FestWochen, 20.05.2025 [ENA]

The Lisaboa Houbrechts' staging of the Bertolt Brecht's Mutter Courage—retitled Moeder Courage—at the 2025 Wiener Festwochen is a masterclass in contemporary theatre direction. Presented at Halle E in the MuseumsQuartier on May 18 and 19, this production revitalizes Brecht's anti-war classic with a visceral, multilingual, and musically rich interpretation that resonates deeply with today's audiences.

Houbrechts, a rising Belgian director known for her bold visual storytelling, remains faithful to Brecht's original text and Paul Dessau's compositions. Yet, she injects the play with a striking immediacy, transforming it into a poignant exploration of the female experience in wartime. The production delves into how war permeates not only nations but also families and women's bodies, posing critical questions: How does one live and survive as a child, a young woman, or a mother during war?

The performance unfolds in Dutch, French, Hebrew, and Kurdish, with German and English surtitles, creating a polyphonic tapestry that underscores the universality of its themes. This linguistic diversity enhances the narrative's depth, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human experiences in conflict. Central to the production is the character of Mother Courage, portrayed as both perpetrator and victim, mother and businesswoman. Houbrechts' direction emphasizes this duality, presenting her as a complex figure navigating the moral ambiguities of war. The staging is both confrontational and empathetic, inviting the audience to grapple with the character's contradictions and the broader implications of survival in times of conflict.

Musically, the production is anchored by Dessau's compositions, performed live by Alain Franco and Aydin İsleyen. İsleyen's vocals and saz playing infuse the score with a haunting resonance, while Franco's arrangements provide a contemporary edge. Notably, certain songs are delivered a cappella, amplifying their emotional impact and drawing attention to the raw human experiences they convey. Visually, the collaboration between Houbrechts and set designer Ralf Nonn results in a stage that is both stark and evocative. The minimalist design, complemented by Fabiana Piccioli's lighting, creates a dynamic environment that shifts seamlessly between scenes, reflecting the tumultuous world the characters inhabit.

The ensemble cast delivers compelling performances, with Lubna Azabal's portrayal of Mother Courage standing out for its depth and nuance. The actors navigate the play's linguistic and emotional complexities with finesse, embodying the resilience and vulnerability of individuals caught in the crossfire of war.

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Moeder Courage is more than a revival; it's a reimagining that bridges the historical context of Brecht's work with contemporary global issues. By highlighting the intersections of war, commerce, and gender, Houbrechts invites audiences to reflect on the cyclical nature of conflict and the human capacity for endurance. This production stands as a testament to enduring relevance of Brecht's message in transformative power of theatre.

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