

From the trenches to the stage

Mother Courage and her Children

Directed by Amanda Bergen
Runs 14-18 November
Second Playing Space, Timms Centre for the Arts

MARIA KOTOVYCH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

People are putting bacon and cheese on their pumpernickel—it must be peacetime, at least according to one scene from Bertolt Brecht's play *Mother Courage and her Children* that discusses how peace brings about excess.

Amanda Bergen, director of *Mother Courage*, mentions that this is just one of many views of war and peace that Brecht presents.

"Almost every comment you could quote from the play is an opinion," Bergen explains. "A lot of the play is like a debate, saying 'here is my version of war, here is what I think war is, I think this is why we need war and this is why I think we don't need war.' And in that sense, that's what Brecht is doing, just putting the opinions out there for people to kind of flush out, and ask questions about."

Mother Courage is a project put on by ABBEDAM, the production company within the Department of Drama. Abbedam, made up of BA, BEd and MA students from the department, got its name by combining those three degree names into one mega-acronym.

The issues and themes raised in the *Mother Courage* are particularly relevant to the war going on today in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is one of the reasons Bergen chose the play. Furthermore, Bergen decided on the



JUNETTE HUYNH

BEGGING FOR MORE According to ABBEDAM, peace only makes us want.

piece because it makes the audience ask questions, and one question that we, as Canadians, need to direct to ourselves is how we feel about our participation in the current Middle East situation.

"With the war going on now, I find myself questioning what my role as a Canadian was, what our role as a full country was and what our government was doing," Bergen says. "I think a lot of the time, we try to be neutral; it's like Canada doesn't have a stance on it, they're just peacekeepers and that's what we do, but when we're in there and people are killing us, we're still fighting back, we're still fighting the war. And just what are our opinions about that, and what do we really stand for?"

According to Bergen, getting enraged or feeling bad about an issue is not enough to create change. As a start, people must question the actions of their government, such as

the decision to support a war. Then citizens should get involved in decision-making, for example, by voting.

"I think that just bashing America and George Bush isn't productive," Bergen says. "I think putting the blame on someone else isn't going to get us anywhere as Canadians. We have a government that's supporting the war, and we seem to just forget about that, and saying that George Bush is an idiot and blah, blah, blah doesn't get us anywhere."

However, Bergen hopes that the set design will ultimately take the audience somewhere, perhaps making it easier to reflect on their society. The play is set in what's called an alley stage, with audience members on either side facing each other.

"I'm hoping that that reflection of themselves in a sense, being across the alley like that, will allow them to open up, and not just get caught up in the world of the play," Bergen says.

A Good Year outshines Tuscan Sun

Plot similarities abound between the two films, but the acting sets them apart

A Good Year

Directed by Ridley Scott
Starring Russell Crowe, Albert Finney and Archie Panjabi
Opens 10 November
Empire Theatres

ELIZABETH VAIL
Arts & Entertainment Staff

A Good Year is a movie hampered by a rather unseemly prejudice. The early buzz towards this film mainly concerned an unfavourable comparison to *Under the Tuscan Sun*, for both films appear to revolve around flawed individuals finding solace in romantic, sun-warmed locales, adorably untidy mansions and humorously eccentric natives.

What's most puzzling, though, is why director Ridley Scott and actor Russell Crowe's second team-up (their first being the testosterone gore-fest *Gladiator*) would be a movie that appears to exist to rope in those few boyfriends who dug in their heels when *Tuscan Sun* appeared in theatres. However, while *Tuscan Sun* was a brittle fairy tale stretched beyond the boundaries of realism, *A Good Year* is a surprisingly warm and funny film.

The main difference between the characters of *Tuscan Sun*'s Frances (Diane Lane) and *A Good Year*'s Max Skinner (Russell Crowe) is that, unlike Frances' saintly betrayed wife, Max is an incurable asshole, and doesn't exactly mind it. We see him as a selfish and petty child—played in flashbacks by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*'s

Freddie Highmore—who, despite the Yoda-like teachings of his wise wine-making uncle Henry (Albert Finney), grows into a selfish and petty adult. A ruthless stock trader, he receives the news of his uncle's demise right after making a borderline-unethical move that wins his company an enormous amount of money.

The film is more than simply *Under the Tuscan Sun* for dudes, and that's mostly due to Crowe's performance.

In order to inherit his uncle's luxurious estate and vineyards, Skinner has to go down to Provence in person, and finds himself faced with numerous complications. After a hilariously disastrous first few days in France, he's determined to sell the place, but finds his plans stymied first by the vineyard's stubborn caretaker Duffot (Didier Bourdon) and second by the appearance of Christie (Abbie Cornish), a girl who alleges to be Henry's daughter, and thus has a greater claim to the estate. However, upon exploring the grounds, Max is visited by memories of the sun-drenched childhood summers he spent there, and gradually finds himself adapting.

A Good Year is as predictable as the seasons—a few silly mysteries

regarding the connection between Max and spunky local waitress Fanny (Marion Cotillard), a legendary secret wine, and Christie's true parentage are all obvious from the get-go. The film is more than simply *Under the Tuscan Sun* for dudes, and that's mostly due to Crowe's performance. With a wink and a smile, he doffs all vestiges of dignity to portray the worst British tourist in the world. While his character is spoiled and offensive (passing a group of French cyclists, he gives them the finger and bellows "Lance Armstrong!"), he's also charming, in a shark-like sort of way, which makes his eventual transition from slyly charming to genuinely charming much more believable.

In fact, the best humour comes from Crowe's gleeful performance, as most of the other jokes are rote and pedestrian (dogs peeing on pant legs, comments about the firmness of Max's ass, a scene with exaggeratedly-awful "Ah-mair-ee-ken" tourists). However, while the cast is colourful, it's not simply eccentric for its own sake, which is a blessing not granted to Diane Lane's sentimental adventure in Tuscany.

In the end, *A Good Year* distances itself, and perhaps surpasses *Under the Tuscan Sun*, because the wine, the wit and the warmth of it doesn't come from a wounded individual discovering new delights and romances in a foreign country, but from a genuine character returning to the site of his true home to find it's outgrown him in his absence.

POWERPLANT
bar • buffet • coffee house

UPCOMING SHOWS @ POWERPLANT

CHECK OUT OUR MYSPACE! • WWW.MYSPACE.COM/POWERPLANTBAR

Ember Swift with Ann Vriend and Sherry-Lee Wiso
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH | \$12 IN ADVANCE | NO MINORS

Raising the Fawn
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17TH with ALL AGES/LICENSED In Flight Safety- \$10 AT THE DOOR Mico, and guests

Skydiggers SUNDAY, NOV 19TH \$18 IN ADVANCE DOORS @ 6PM with AA Sound System and James Murdoch Band

Wil & Shaun Verreault (WIDE MOUTH MASON) WITH COLIN PRIESTNER
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20TH | ADVANCE TIX \$12

MURDER CITY SPARROWS WITH DRIVE BY PUNCH AND O FOUR WHAT THURSDAY, NOV 23RD ADVANCE TIX \$10

TOKYO with The Grates & This Civil Twilight
Police Club FRIDAY, NOV 24TH TIX \$10 AT THE DOOR

WITH THE HOLLOW AND GUESTS ALL AGES AND LICENSED
JAKALOPE TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH | ADVANCE TIX \$17.50 | DOORS @ 7PM

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30TH
THAT 1 GUY
TICKETS \$8 AT DOOR

LAST DAY OF CLASSES!
The Hidden Cameras WEDNESDAY WITH BORN RUFFIANS
DECEMBER 6TH | ADVANCE TIX \$14 | ALL AGES/LICENSED

nathan WITH THE WHEAT POOL AND THE PLAIN DEALERS
SATURDAY, DEC 9TH | \$10 AT THE DOOR

UPCOMING SHOWS AT: **the HOROWITZ theatre**

Theresa Sokyorka
Advanced tickets \$18 SUNDAY NOV 19TH
This event is reserved seating only

SARAH SLEAN
WITH GUESTS Sunday November 26th
\$18 in advance, reserved seating

DOORS AT 8PM AND SHOWS ARE NO MINORS UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

www.su-venues.ca
www.myspace.com/suvenues
www.myspace.com/powerplantbar

For more info, call 492-2048 or visit www.su-venues.ca
The Powerplant is a service of Your Students' Union for UofA students, staff, alumni, and their guests

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA STUDENTS' UNION