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# Baal

May 21, 2010 Tom Williams

By Bertolt Brecht

Translated from German by Peter Tegel

Directed by Zeljko Djukic

With original music by Josh Schmidt

Musical Director Wayne Parham

Produced by Tuta Theatre Chicago



Bertolt Brecht's first full play, Baal, is in marvelous hands with the creative folks at Tuta Theatre Chicago.

Bertolt Brecht's plays challenge the most talented theatre troupes and his 1919 first full-length play is a particular difficult work to stage. But leave it to the genius of director Zeljko Djukic to allow complete artistic collaboration from all parties including actors, musicians, lighting, set designers to explore the subtleties and nuances in Brecht's initial work, Baal. In my interview with Keith Parham ( to be posted on [www.theatreinchicago.com/podcast](http://www.theatreinchicago.com/podcast) on Monday, May 24), the lighting designer and composer Josh Schmidt, both talked at length about the energy and output in the creative process from all members of the show. They speak highly of the terrific atmosphere of discovery that blossomed in the rehearsals of Baal under director Djukic's leadership. This Baal is not like any Bertolt Brecht show you may have seen. Surprises abound and you'll not find a finer score in a Brecht play than Josh Schmidt has created. Baal is unlike anything you've witnessed on stage.

Seldom will you see a more committed ensemble whose work possessed a full investment into the material. Ian Westerfer, Jacqueline Stone, Lindsey Gavel, Dana Black, Stacie Beth Green, Ben Harris, Rachel Rizzuto, Dana Wall, Steve Hadnagy, Ted Evans and Peter Oyloe each dedicated themselves to the project. The cast's movement, timing, singing and musicianship was creatively polished

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and true to the story. From the clever opening designed to entice the audience to embrace Baal's story to the opening song, we quickly enter Baal world of hedonism. We follow Baal (Ian Westerer in a tour de force performance), a revered poet, musician, and lover, as he raises to fame and power. We see Baal as a hard drinking, womanizer whose anti-society traits makes him apart of a cult of genius bent on living outside the conventions of society. He is a pure German anti-hero.



We witness Baal's many sexual encounters including seducing Johanna (Lindsey Gavel), who subsequently drowns herself. He leaves his pregnant mistress Sophie (Stacie Beth Green). He travels with his friend Ekart (Peter Oyloe in a commanding turn) with whom he tries to seduce and eventually kills in a fit of

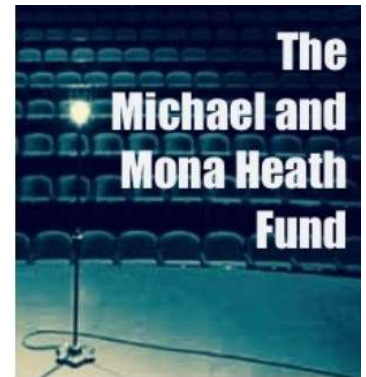
jealous rage. Baal self-destructs from his own debauchery. Faced with the universal question: "Is it better to stick to one's beliefs or sell out?" Baal travels down his own path. See this fabulous show and judge for yourself. Keep in mind, Baal resists imposed structure as Baal's drunkenness includes wine, woman and principle. It requires an open mind and total awareness. It is worth your efforts. Just let it flow...it delivers.

Among the stellar artistic choices in Baal are the terrific set design (by Brandon Wardell) with large windows with Keith Parham's evocative lighting that aptly depicts the moods and atmosphere of the piece. Baal's language is poetic filled with harmony, rhythm that begs to sing. Composer Josh Schmidt (Adding Machine – A Musical and The Minister's Wife) has written some exquisite music that brings Baal to higher level of art by emphasizing and enhancing Brecht's words. We hear hymns, anthems and folksy music. Schmidt told me that much of his score for Baal was in the Portuguese musical genre called Fado (destiny or fate). Fado uses mournful tunes, a haunting longing for something or someone. We hear Schmidt's melodic music enriching the story as it creates a deeper understanding of the emotional torment of Baal and his compatriots. I have never heard a finer use of original music in a Brecht play. Schmidt is a genius at the top of his art.




The cast of fine singers and musicians did justice to the score. Ian Westerer, Ben Harris and Peter Oyloe strutted their musical acumen. The cast produced excellent harmonies seldom found in non-Equity musicals. While Baal is a play with music, not a musical, but you'd be hard pressed to find better tunes than Josh Schmidt has penned.


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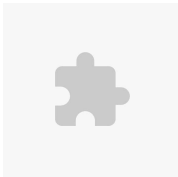
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Baal is an eclectic, densely wordy work filled with Brecht's richly metaphoric language. It is ambiguous, sexy, even sadistic, but it also is an idea play that begs more questions than it answers. TuTa's production is a marvelous work of art filled with caring, honest creativity from all involved. Baal is refreshingly inventive as it swiftly blends drama with raw sensuality. Baal is a masterpiece of theatre as it demonstrates what the power of dedicated artists can produce once they are in creative sync. Kudos to director Zeljko Djukic for having the courage and foresight foster a rich collaborative environment.

If you want to see theatre as art, get to Chopin Theatre's studio theatre to see Baal. You'll be amazed at the power of live theatre. Baal deserves a large audience for every performance. Baal is one of the finest shows of 2010.

**Editor's Note:** Be sure to listen to my interview with Josh Schmidt and Keith Parham about the making of Baal on [www.theatreinchicago.com/talk](http://www.theatreinchicago.com/talk) to be posted on Monday, May 24, 2010 also the music you're hearing is from Baal.



### Highly Recommended

Tom Williams

Talk Theatre in Chicago podcast

Date Reviewed: May 20, 2010

### Jeff Recommended



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