A History of the Berliner Ensemble

The Berliner Ensemble was founded by Bertolt Brecht and his wife Helene Weigel in 1949. The company soon gained international prominence, and its productions and philosophy influenced the work of theatre-makers around the world. David Barnett’s book is the first study of the company in any language. Based on extensive archival research, it uncovers Brecht’s working methods and those of the company’s most important directors after his death. The book considers the boon and burden of Brecht’s legacy and provides new insights into battles waged behind the scenes for the preservation of the Brechtian tradition. The Berliner Ensemble was also the German Democratic Republic’s most prestigious cultural export, attracting attention from the highest circles of government, and from the Stasi, before it privatized itself after German reunification in 1990. Barnett pieces together a complex history that sheds light on both the company’s groundbreaking productions and their turbulent times.

David Barnett is Reader in Drama, Theatre and Performance at the University of Sussex. He is the author of Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance (2014), Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the German Theatre (Cambridge, 2005) and Literature versus Theatre: Textual Problems and Theatrical Realization in the Later Plays of Heiner Müller (1998). He has also edited the ninth volume of Brecht’s collected plays in English, the Berliner Ensemble Adaptations (2014). He writes extensively on political and postdramatic theatre in Europe and has published articles in Modern Drama and Contemporary Theatre Review on Brechtian and post-Brechtian theatre.
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David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*
A History of the Berliner Ensemble

David Barnett
For Georgina, my wife,
and for Geoff Westgate,
because a mention in the Acknowledgements
simply isn’t enough
Contents

List of figures \hfill page xi
Acknowledgements \hfill xiii
List of abbreviations \hfill xv

Introduction \hfill 1
1 The Berliner Ensemble as an opportunity to establish a new type of theatre \hfill 8
2 The founding and the first season of the Berliner Ensemble \hfill 39
3 The Berliner Ensemble’s years at the Deutsches Theater: 1949–1953 \hfill 78
4 Brecht’s last seasons at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm: 1954–1956 \hfill 122
5 Developing the Brechtian legacy: 1956–1961 \hfill 146
6 Making theatre politically after the Berlin Wall: 1961–1965 \hfill 171
7 Years of crisis: 1966–1971 \hfill 199
8 A new beginning: 1971–1974 \hfill 230
9 A new crisis: 1974–1977 \hfill 264
10 A safe pair of hands: 1977–1981 \hfill 298
11 Crisis and stagnation: 1981–1989 \hfill 323
12 Wekwerth’s last stand: 1989–1991 \hfill 355
13 From gang of five to power of one: 1992–1995 \hfill 370
14 The last hurrahs: 1996–1999 \hfill 416
Figures

2.1 Sketch of Mr Puntila and His Man Matti. Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich, Zw. IV 8015. ©Caspar Neher Estate page 56
2.2 Mr Puntila and His Man Matti, November 1949. BBA Theaterdokumentation 2260 (34). ©Ruth Berlau/Hilde Hoffmann 56
2.3 Mr Puntila and His Man Matti, November 1949. BBA Theaterdokumentation 2260 (11). Photographer unknown 63
2.4 Vassa Zheleznova, December 1949. BBA BE FA Bg. 009/005. Photographer unknown 66
3.1 The Mother, January 1951. BBA Theaterdokumentation 2162–050. Hainer Hill 90
3.2 The Kremlin Chimes, March 1952. BBA BE FA Bg. 015/006. Photographer unknown 111
4.1 The Caucasian Chalk Circle, October 1954. Gerda Goedhart/Brecht Estate 129
4.2 Battle in Winter, January 1955. BBA BE FA Bg. 007/001. Photographer unknown 141
5.1 The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, March 1959. BBA Theaterdokumentation 4419–009. Photographer unknown 164
6.1 Coriolan, September 1964. BBA Theaterdokumentation 630–003. Percy Paukscha/Inge Steinert 187
6.2 In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer, April 1965. BBA BE FA 038/007. Photographer unknown 196
7.1 Seven against Thebes, May 1969. BBA BE FA Bg. 016/014. Photographer unknown 219
8.1 In the Jungle of the Cities, January 1971. BBA BE FA Bg. 049/009. Photographer unknown 240
8.2 Cement, October 1973. BBA BE FA Bg. 035/008. Vera Tenschert 258
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>xii</th>
<th>List of figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td><em>The Mother</em>, October 1974. © Maria Steinfeldt 267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td><em>Galileo Galilei</em>, February 1978. BBA BE FA Bg. 004/002. © Vera Tenschert 305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td><em>Blue Horses on Red Grass</em>, October 1980. BBA BE FA Bg. 028/002. Photographer unknown 316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td><em>Drums in the Night</em>, March 1983. BBA BE FA Bg. 001/008. © Vera Tenschert 328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td><em>Faust Scenes (Urfau</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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xiv Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AdK</td>
<td>Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts)</td>
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<td>BArch</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBA</td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Berliner Ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEA</td>
<td>Berliner Ensemble Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFA</td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht, <em>Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe</em>, ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller (Berlin and Frankfurt/Main: Aufbau and Suhrkamp, 1988–2000) (= Complete Works in German. References give volume and page numbers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BStU</td>
<td>Bundesbehörde für Stasi-Unterlagen (Federal Authority for Stasi Documents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAK</td>
<td>Deutsche Akademie der Künste (German Academy of Arts, the first incarnation of the AdK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT</td>
<td>Deutsches Theatre (Berlin)</td>
</tr>
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<td>ESA</td>
<td>Ekkehard Schall Archive</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDA</td>
<td>Friedrich Dieckmann Archive</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>GI</td>
<td>Geheimer Informator (secret informer for the Stasi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GmbH</td>
<td>Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (limited liability company)</td>
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</table>
Abbreviations

GMS Gesellschaftlicher Mitarbeiter für Sicherheit (social collaborator on security for the Stasi)

HMA Heiner Müller Archive

HWA Helene Weigel Archive

IM Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (unofficial collaborator with the Stasi)


JTA Joachim Tenschert Archive

KO Komische Oper (Comic Opera, Berlin)

KVP Kasernierte Volkspolizei (Garrisoned People’s Police)

LAB Landesarchiv Berlin (Berlin City Archive)


MWA Manfred Wekwerth Archive

NVA Nationale Volksarmee (National People’s Army)

RBA Ruth Berghaus Archive

SAPMO Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Charitable trust for the archive of the parties and mass organizations of the German Democratic Republic – hosted by the Bundesarchiv)

SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)

StaKuKo Staatliche Kunstkommission (the GDR’s State Art Commission)

TiW Theater in der Wende (Theatre in the Wende)

Werke Heiner Müller, Werke, ed. by Frank Hörnigk (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998–2008). References give volume and page numbers