

scattily by Lila Kedrova, is a revelation. She sings strongly and surely and tells us, in her eyes and in her longing, about the persecutions of the century.

Elsewhere, we meet up again with the two peripatetic maternal giants of world theatre: Rose, the mother of Gypsy Rose Lee, pushing her daughters from Seattle to Omaha in the Twenties while vaudeville is overtaken by burlesque; and Brecht's *Mother Courage*, pulling her canteen wagon, and her three children, around Central Europe during the Thirty Years War.

Both shows define the art of scraping a living in hostile circumstances. Both heroines are appealing, imperfect and tragic. They lose their children but carry on, one exploding into a nervous breakdown finale, the other trudging defiantly onwards with her cart. Mama Rose is described as 'a pioneer woman without a frontier'. *Mother Courage* has fewer pretensions to glamour, but a similar wanderlust and an equally low opinion of men.

Rose holds everything together, as does Brecht's heroine in *Mother Courage and Her Children* (RNT, Cottesloe), a jaunty, decent production by Anthony Clark for the National's education department. Hanif Kureishi's translation and Sue Davies's lyrics were made for the RSC's spectacular, sensual 1984 staging, with Judi Dench and Zoe Wanamaker. They are worth hearing again.

Powerful new music by Mark Vibrans, and a vital, cheeky-chappie performance by Ellie Haddington reinforce an earthy, music-hall, non-nonsense quality. What you miss is the epic, outdoor scale and the barbaric realism. Kate Burnett's design is a cut-out white-washed townscape, an immobile truck, anything-goes costumes and a downstage Bakelite wireless which crackles with BBC Home Service historical updates.

It is sometimes difficult to see the point of Molière in English. Not at the Almeida, where Richard Wilbur's superb 1971 rhyming verse translation

Coveney on Mother Courage

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