

Penny for your dark thoughts: Capital Playhouse presents 'Opera'

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Although it premiered in Berlin in 1928, Bertolt Brecht's "The Threepenny Opera" fits amazingly well into the latest headlines.

"This talks a lot about corporate greed," said Jeff Kingsbury, who's directing the Capital Playhouse production, opening tonight. "There are dozens of references to bankers and how corrupt they are and which is worse, robbing a bank or founding a bank. And here we have a \$700 billion bailout of the stock market."



"Macheath [also known as "Mack the Knife"] and the show's other thieves, pickpockets and beggars have their own ideas of morals and ethics," said Kingsbury, the Playhouse's artistic director.

"Mack the Knife says, 'You look at us and wag your finger, but we're at least honest about what our game is. You rob people every day, only you're really shady about it,'" Kingsbury said. "'The most powerful people in the world create poverty and then can't bear to look at it.'"

A critique of capitalism might sound dark and heavy for a night of musical theater, but the show also is darkly funny.

"We are having an absolute blast with it and finding a lot of humor," the director said. "No one is going to leave thinking, 'I'm going to slit my wrists.' They are going to get a chuckle, and there's a whole intellectual component where you want to talk about what you just saw."

One thing audience members are likely to be asking themselves: "What is morality?"

Take Peachum, the king of the beggars.

"Nobody goes around London begging without having a license from him," said Russ Holm, who plays Peachum. "Anybody who tries to beg without a license gets his fingers cut off or finds himself beat up or something worse."

There's a moral code there, though.

"With these beggars, that's their profession," said the actor, who has not done a Capital Playhouse role before but is well-known to Olympia theatergoers, largely through his work with Harlequin Productions. "To have somebody else out there freelancing as a beggar, they consider that a crime, that that's just wrong."

"It's a highly regarded thing going out begging on the street. Not just anybody can do it. You have to be licensed to do it."

Even presented comically, the socialist perspective of the show - by Brecht and Kurt Weill - is not something that many theaters tackle.

"It's the type of play that Olympia audiences don't get to see very often, and it's a milestone for us," Kingsbury said. "We're stepping out of things that we know are absolutely going to appeal to the entire community and daring to be a little bit bold in what we're presenting."

Billed as "thrillingly offensive," the performance is neither for the faint of heart nor for the strictly politically correct. Kingsbury is using the Marc Blitzstein translation but with more pointed lyrics by Jeremy Sams.

"Even at the time it was written, it dared to offend," Kingsbury said. "When I saw it on Broadway the first time, I found myself laughing at things that in today's politically correct world we don't laugh at. But I was laughing along with the entire audience. There's a thrill to allowing yourself to enjoy something that's this offensive."