“It is only theatre!” one character shouts out in the last scene of Brink Productions’ *Drums in the Night*, and, pointing to the narrator, exclaims “that’s enough of this alienation effect - and I’ll now stop this romantic staring.” The words are mostly Brecht’s, with a tweak from translator Finegan Kruckemeyer, and they comically highlight those signatures of style that, although found everywhere in the theatre, are still called “Brechtian”.

*Drums in the Night*, written in the early 1920s when the playwright himself was only just out of his teens, has many of the elements of the later, more famous works. Featuring a simple, fable-like plot, satiric comment on corrupt power and served with a mix of music, songs and comic banter, this turbulent drama tells the story of Andreas Kragler, a soldier in the First World War, who comes back from the dead to find Anna, his betrothed, is about to marry Murk (William Allert), an opportunist young cad who is keenly currying favour with her father, Herr Balicke, (Michael Habib) a war profiteer and all-round class villain.

Brink Productions director Chris Drummond and his excellent collaborators have taken an obscure early work of a now neglected playwright and enlivened it in ways that could very well serve Brecht’s better known plays also. Kruckemeyer’s text is not only lively (if, at times, a little too verbally dexterous for its own good) it provides a quick reverse chronology of Modern European history and contextualises the restless radicalism of the times in which the young Bert is writing.

Designer Gaele Mellis and lighting wiz Geoff Cobham use the cabaret setting to great effect - the stage area is a wide as cinerama and the red moon effects and sidelong of scenes - such as the gluttonous family spouting more food than sense, and of Kragler’s wraith-like return - are especially notable. The performances are evenly good. Habib’s Balicke is like a Weimar cartoon and Jacqy Phillips’s long suffering wife, Allert’s calculating Murk and David Mealor as the narrator Babusch, all do well. Michaela...
Cantwell gives us some silent gags as the maid and a great torch song while Cameron Goodall provides some deadpan waitering and a grunge version of *The Ballad of the Dead Soldier*. Quentin Grant’s astute piano score and song arrangements also greatly enhance the production.

But it is Rory Walker and Ksenja Logos as Kragler and Anna who provide the key central focus that is at once melodramatic, ironic and strangely affecting. Walker’s presence, delivery and understanding of the play’s performance style is exceptional and Logos also shows range and inventiveness. Further evidence of the high calibre of Brink’s work, let us hope these *Drums* will be heard in other cities as well.