

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

What exactly IS *Urinetown*? Actor Daniel Marcus, who played Officer Barrel in the original production, deemed it “a love letter to the American musical in the form of a grenade.” Yet this irreverent love letter had humble and unconventional beginnings. Conceived by librettist, Greg Kotis, the idea for *Urinetown* began when, on “a poorly planned trip to Europe,” he found himself having to choose between using the bathroom and eating. He then took this absurd notion to friend and composer, Mark Hollman, who agreed to write the music. Despite both artists’ low expectations, this show with the questionable title first found life via the New York Fringe Festival in 1999, then Off-Broadway and, due to its popularity, on Broadway, opening September 10, 2001. After an understandably rough opening in New York due to its unfortunate timing, *Urinetown* went on to be nominated for ten Tony Awards and won Best Score, Original Score, and Direction.

Without Bertolt Brecht, however, there most likely would be no *Urinetown* at all. This show is obviously inspired by the German writer and director whose goal was to pull the audience out of the fictional reality of the show by forcing them to confront the story and its characters with thought and action. The Brechtian idea of a show’s ability to both entertain and educate is apparent in *Urinetown*’s self-referential humor and use of parody, often paying homage to classical musical theatre styles and traditions while making fun of the musical genre itself. But even if you do not recognize the musical references and choreographic nods, you will feel its satirical nature and its invitation to poke fun at not only other musicals but at deeper, more complex situations. This social fable of greed, corruption, environmentalism, and other political topics relevant to society today allows you to laugh because, as Brecht himself once said, “Sometimes it's more important to be human, than to have good taste.” So you do not have to be a Brechtian scholar or dramatic theorist in order to go on “the journey down to *Urinetown*.” You just need to be open to the experience. Welcome...

■ Stacy Alley, director and choreographer