

Production History

First Production

Date: March 8, 1945

Theatre: La Carátula

Location: Buenos Aires, Argentina

Director: Maragrita Xirgu

Set Designer: Santiago Ontañón

Actress in Title Role: Margarita Xirgua

Notes: The production premiered nine years after the play's completion, due to the circumstances of Lorca's death. Margarita Xirgu, the lead actress and director, had been a close friend of Lorca's and collaborated with him on a number of projects, often as his leading lady. Because of this, many of Lorca's plays premiered in Buenos Aires at her company. Xirgu stated that she chose each of her fifteen actresses carefully, with the intention of fully embodying the complex psychology of every character. After the curtain call on opening night, Xirgu cursed the Spanish Civil War and the political turmoil that led to Lorca's death, highlighting the play's antifascist nature.

First Major American Production

Date: Autumn, 1963

Theatre: Encore Theatre

Location: San Francisco, California

Director: Lee Brewster

Notes: At the time when this production premiered, the most recent Lorca drama to be translated into English had been *Blood Wedding*. While still more realistic than his earlier works, *Blood Wedding* is certainly more stylized than *Bernarda Alba*, in its use of song and symbolic characters. This production of *Bernarda Alba* was often favorably compared with *Blood Wedding*. Reviewers praised the play's balance between poetry and realism, in contrast with *Blood Wedding*, which many reviewers felt had been overwrought. In fact, when *Blood Wedding* premiered in the 1930s in San Francisco, some of Lorca's lush imagery reduced the audience to tears of laughter.

First Production in Spain

Date: 1964

Theatre: Teatro Goya

Location: Madrid, Spain

Director: Juan Antonio Bardem

Set Designer: Antonio Saura

Actress in Title Role: Candida Losada

Notes: The director, Juan Antonio Bardem, was particularly concerned with how the women are isolated in the house from the outside world. He noted that each new set (the play is in three acts, and has a different set for each act) should move us deeper into the house, and that walls should remain incredibly high. He also requested that the light in each act be constant, unless outside light intrudes on the scene (such as a door opening), thus highlighting how cloistered the women are. He saw Bernarda as authority incarnate, who is always concerned with maintaining her authority, even after Adela kills herself.

Spanish Production

Date: Autumn, 1984

Theatre: Teatro Español

Location: Madrid, Spain

Director: José Carlos Plaza

Set Designer: Andrea D'Odorico

Actress in Title Role: Berta Riaza

Notes: Unlike Bardem's and Xigu's productions, Carlos Plaza was interested in a much more realistic approach to the piece. While he adhered to Lorca's stage directions that the set should be white to contrast with the black of everyone's dresses (with the exception of Adela's green dress), he also maintained that the set should be as realistic as possible, rather than a stylized swath of white. He also emphasized the hardships in Bernarda's past as the source of her attitude where Bardem had seen her more as a relentlessly tyrannical figure. Carlos Plaza saw her second marriage as a bitter disappointment, and it was her husband's implied infidelities that led her to be so over-protective of her daughters. Reviews of this production characterized the play as being a great example of realism, and wrote that the acting was highly naturalistic.

Major British Production

Date: September 8, 1986

Theatre: Lyric Theatre

Location: London, United Kingdom

Director: Nuria Espert

Set Designer: Ezio Frigerio

Actress in Title Role: Glenda Jackson

Notes: In Bardem's production, Bernarda had been coolly manipulative. The actress never raised her voice unless absolutely necessary. In this production, director Nuria Espert was more interested in a snarling, towering Bernarda, encouraging Glenda Jackson to embrace a more stylized, unhinged performance. Espert was also interested in balancing the poetic with the realistic in the design. While the set was essentially naturalistic, certain exaggerations made the set look a bit like a prison. While the production has become arguably the most well known British production, at the time it had its detractors. One of the most common criticisms of the

production was that, for all its skill, it seemed too much like it was set in an English drawing room, rather than Lorca's Spain.

Small British Production

Date: October 9, 1992

Theatre: Gate Theatre

Location: London, United Kingdom

Director: Katie Mitchell

Actress in Title Role: Dinah Stabb

Notes: Katie Mitchell's production of the show, while not a radical interpretation, was a break from the grandeur and stateliness of the Espert production. Mitchell was able to use the small size of the theatre to emphasize the claustrophobia of the house. She also added a number of flourishes to her production. She hinted at the possibility of an incestuous relationship between two of the sisters (Amelia and Martirio), drew more explicit parallels between the plays and 1930s fascism, and through a tableaux based on DaVinci's *Last Supper*, turn Adela into a Christ-like figure.

Recent British Adaptation – David Hare's Version

Date: March 15, 2005

Theatre: National Theatre

Location: London, United Kingdom

Director: Howard Davies

Set Designer: Vicki Mortimer

Actress in Title Role: Penelope Wilton

Notes: David Hare's recent adaptation of the play indicate that the British relationship with the play may be very different than the American relationship with the play. Though Hare's was not a new play, it was a somewhat looser adaptation, without strict adherence to each line of the original text. Hare chose to more directly highlight role of fascism in the play, most notably in the language used to describe Bernarda Alba. She is at one point called "the empress of all she surveys." Davies also paid great attention to Bernarda's cane, as a potent symbol of her domination over the house.

Recent American Adaptation – The Musical *Bernarda Alba*

Date: March 6, 2006

Theatre: Lincoln Center

Location: New York, New York

Director: Graciela Daniele

Set Designer: Christopher Barreca

Actress in Title Role: Phylicia Rashad

Notes: This musical adaptation by Michael John LaChiusa may characterize some of the more problematic American perceptions about the play. Tellingly, the show

begins with the line, "One upon another time," setting it up as a fable. The score's use of flamenco music ramps up the sensuality of the story (reflected in director Graciela Daniele's erotic choreography), and the show's primary concern became the sexual repression of the women. Many reviews criticized the play for simplifying Lorca's poetry to a string of carnal imagery, and for missing the larger resonance of the piece.