

Hartford Stage, Hartford, CT

All My Sons, by Arthur Miller. Directed by Melia Bensussen.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“None of them believed I was innocent.”

In Arthur Miller’s great play, “All My Sons,” (my personal favorite of his works) a very political issue is addressed in a very personal way and the interpersonal reactions to this issue resonate right up to the present day. Considering that the play was written and produced in 1946, just after World War II ended, this is an amazing new concept for our contemporary audiences. Still, it is true. Poorly manufactured airplane parts created by Joe Keller’s company cause the deaths of twenty pilots. Joe’s older son has **[spoiler alert]** also died in an airplane crash but we don’t learn about that until the end of the third act. Joe’s wife Kate insists that the boy is alive somewhere. His former fiancé, Annie, knows the truth but can’t make Kate realize it. The Keller’s younger son, Chris, has fallen in love with Ann and plans to marry her, a fate her own brother disagrees with vehemently. These conflicts make up the bones of the play, but it is the skin, the text and the treatment by the author, that makes the play such a winner. The current production at Hartford Stage is also a winner. A big winner actually, with laughs and chills and a dramatic finale that brings tears to your eyes, or to my eyes at any rate. The end of Act Two and most of Act Three had me almost in convulsions of sorrow. It’s a great play.



Michael Gaston, Ben Katz, Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Michael Gaston is an easy-going Joe Keller. He plays Joe with a sense of humanity I've never seen before in this role. This helps give Joe a sympathetic response from the audience that gives his final act an amazing, shocked reaction. He is so charming and loveable through most of the play that his ultimate choice is wonderfully surprising. As his obstinate, deeply internalizing



Marsha Mason, Fiona Robberson; Photo: T. Charles Erickson

wife Kate, Marsha Mason delivers a performance of equal strength and compassion. She makes us want to hate Kate for her unrealistic view of things, but at the same time she manages to create a sweet and likeable woman. It is very good work by this actress. Their son Chris is played by Ben Katz who brings an awkward strength to his role, making him the obvious child of Joe and still a young man who has learned to tolerate his mother's mania. Katz is almost charming but the tension he instills in every

moment of Chris's existence makes him both edgy and intriguing.

New neighbors and old ones make the plot amusing and almost embarrassing. As the Baylisses, Godfrey L. Simmons, Jr. as the doctor and Yadira Correa as his bitter wife add a dimension of humor and satire to the play and both do it well. As the former neighbors Ann and George Deaver Fiona Robberson and Reece Dos Santos add drama, tension and romance into the mixture. Robberson brings the romance and tension into the play and Dos Santos eventually brings in the dramatic energy with story revelations that shake things up. They are the children of Joe's former partner, now in



Godfrey L. Simmons, Jr., Yadira Correa;
Photo: T. Charles Erickson

prison for crimes he incidentally committed. Robberson as Chris's love interest is splendid.

Miller weaves a viable community into his play. Housewife and mother (three kids) Lydia Lubey, played sweetly by Caitlin Zoz, is George Deaver's former girlfriend while her husband Frank, enthusiastically played by Dan Whelton, is an amateur astronomer who feeds Kate's suspicions that her son is still alive. Malachy Gianovsky is a local kid who believes Joe to be a sheriff with a jail cell in his cellar. His total belief in Joe helps to establish the older man as a local hero of sorts which intensifies the image he likes to portray. The young actor brings a nice credibility to the role.

Director Melia Bensussen has given Miller's play a handsome, well-conceived production with smart touches of reality rarely seen in this play. She has kept its period sensibility alive while giving us an oddly realistic look at today's politics and imperious choices.



Fiona Robberson, Reece Dos Santos;
Photo: T. Charles Erickson



Marsha Mason; Photo: T. Charles Erickson

The design team has created a brilliant set, good costumes and extraordinary lighting. Set on a verdant hillside the Keller home was designed by Riw Rakkulchon. The costumes by An-Lin Dauber were appropriately middle-class 1940s in style. The lighting design by Mary Louise Geiger was superb, although I would have liked some stars in the expansive sky-drop.

Seeing this production of the play I love was mandatory and I am so glad I went. When the drama is this good and the company is this special there is no greater pleasure to be had than seeing "All My Sons" once again. If it is your first time, what a treat you have in store!

+ 04/27/2024 +

All My Sons plays at Hartford Stage, 50 Church Street, Hartford, Connecticut through May 5. For information and tickets call 860-527-5151