

Barrington Stage Company. Pittsfield, MA

Forgiveness, by Mark St. Germain. Directed by Ron Lagomarsino.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Okay, I was extremely scared of going to prison.”

Four convicted criminals face four members of the State of Minnesota’s Board of Pardons. The cases are heard five years after each has completed a prison sentence. The hope of a pardon means a prayer for clemency and a return to more normal life for each of them. Mark St. Germain’s new play is based on real cases and the outcomes are what the Board actually dealt in each case. For a historic document this is fine, but for a play in which the audience gets to vote on the final decision there is a sense of cheating the public. Other authors have used the audience involvement in different ways. For example in Ayn Rand’s courtroom drama, *Night of January 16th*, the audience-member jury did decide the result and guilty or not (as the script would assert) the vote of the paying jury held sway. St. Germain could have done something similar but he chose to deliver the reality rather than the theatrical (though with a verbal bow to all of us)/.



Rodney Hicks, Peggy Pharr Wilson, Darlene Hope, Joey Collins. Photo: Daniel Rader.

Each of the four actors in this play get to perform three roles. They are the Pardons Board, the accused and the witnesses for each case plea. The various parts played are wildly different from one another so this talented cast display their interpretive talents to the fullest. Joey Collins plays a man who has molested a teen-age girl and teaches music to children. It is his most dynamic role. His sheer nervousness is incredible to watch.

Rodney Hicks plays a young man whose unrelenting anger and hostility get in the way of his better judgement. His barely concealed furies are fantastic, and when he turns around in the

next explored case to play a sympathetic minister the change in his interpretation is lovely.



Rodney Hicks, Joey Collins. Photo: Daniel Rader.

She was excellent in that role also. It is wonderful how a simple costume alteration and an actor's craft can let us easily witness these changes and accept them without a quibble.

This world premiere production has been very well directed by Ron Lagomarsino. There is a naturalness in the players' work that delivers a sense of reality that makes the experience seem very real indeed. Lagomarsino has helped his actors create so many roles that a scarf, a sweater, a jacket make a world of difference in the actors' work. Director, playwright and performers (for they really do perform in so many ways) bring us a world drawn from a real place and real people in real situations. That reality is genuine and in this play that genuineness holds the dramatic keys to this kingdom called stage-Minnesota.

The simple, handsome set has been designed by Brian Prather whose lack of color delivers authenticity to the show. The costumes designed by Dina El-Aziz give the actors opportunities to create real people within the confines of their written characters. The reality of Collins's suit, transformed by a scarf that brings color into the ugly situation his guilty character displays, is a fine example of what a good designer can bring to a play like this. Reza Behjat uses lighting to assist in the transitions from one character to another. Brendan Aanes sound design is another fine element of the play, although I never heard the final ten-minute bell (each criminal has ten minutes to make a case)..

Peggy Pharr Wilson plays a woman who took revenge on a rival by setting fire to the other woman's closet. Her trembling rendition of the facts in the case was beautifully done, but her later appearance as the adult daughter of a murdered man tops just about everything else in the play.

Darlene Hope plays the murderess and her grief over her act was palpable, but her despair over not apologizing for her act moved me to tears. She also played a woman who has taken the sex abuser into her life.



Darlene Hope. Photo: Daniel Rader.



Peggy Pharr Wilson, Rodney Hicks. Photo: Daniel Rader.

This is a terrific, wonderful play and we are lucky to have it here for its world premiere. I think there are still some choices to make, but that's me talking and not Mark St. Germain. He may like things just the way they are. The play is fascinating and the work by the actors is superior. This a perfect, short (65 minutes) play that lets everyone involved emerge triumphant. It is so worthwhile.

+ 08/04/2024 +

Forgiveness plays on the St. Germain Stage at Barrington Stage Company's Sydelle and Lee Blatt Performing Art Center, 36 Linden Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts through August 25. For information and tickets go to barringtonstageco.org or call 413-236-8888.

