



THEATRE JACKSONVILLE REVIEW: TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

👤 Dick Kerekes & Leisla Sansom 🕒 September 26, 2017 📁 Dual Critics, Family, Feature, On Stage, San Marco, Theatre 👁 2,787 Views

A DUAL CRITICS REVIEW

Theatre Jacksonville traditionally opens each new season with the production of a theatrical classic, and has launched the 2017 – 2018 season with an outstanding production of “To Kill a Mockingbird.” It will be on stage until the first of October. Call 904-396-4425 or visit theatrejax.com for reservations and additional information.

For this production, Theatre Jacksonville has prepared a program which includes biographies of the cast and crew, and an extensive study guide with information about the author, the story, and the performance history of the play. We suggest checking out the guide before the curtain to enhance your enjoyment of this great play.

“Mockingbird” was written by Harper Lee (1926 – 2016) and published in 1960. The book won the Pulitzer Prize, sold over forty million copies, and has never been out of print. It was dramatized by Christopher Sergel, with Lee’s permission and the stipulation that it could not be staged by professional theaters. In 1962, the story was made into a film starring Gregory Peck, who won an Oscar as Best Actor for his portrayal of lawyer Atticus Finch.

Set Designer Tim Watson’s marvelous and imaginative set depicts the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama during 1935, the time of the Great Depression and a time when racial segregation was enforced throughout the South. The first act has the home of the Finch’s at the left of the stage, with a small two-story house on the right. In the second act, the stage is transformed into a courtroom, filled with tables and chairs; it includes a balcony for viewers.

The first act depicts the lifestyle and concerns of inhabitants of a small town in the deep South, where the family of the widowed Atticus Finch lives with his children Scout and Jem. Atticus is a respected town lawyer and principal character, and is brilliantly depicted by Gary Lee Weber.

The play has a narrator, Jean Louise, who is Scout, grown up. She introduces many of the residents of the town and provides commentary throughout; she is visible only to the audience. She is portrayed splendidly by Chelsae Baxley who was last seen on TJ's stage in "Steel Magnolias."

Three terrific young actors play key roles convincingly, conveying childhood innocence. Siblings Caitlyn Fennell (Scout) and Caleb Fennell (Jem) attend school in Baker County. Christian Douglas appears as Dill, a good friend of Scout and Jem. Douglas, the oldest, is a student at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts; his character is based on the real-life Truman Capote, a childhood friend of Harper Lee.

The second act will have you sitting on the edge of your seat as Tom Robinson (Charles Walker) a black man, is brought to trial for the alleged rape of Mayella Ewell (Sofia Ferraro), a white woman. Atticus has been appointed as his attorney and his confrontation with the prosecuting attorney Mr. Gilmer (Gary Elgin Moore) reveals strong differing opinions about human behavior.

This show, under the exceptional direction of Joe Kemper, who was recently selected as the new Musical Director of Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, has attracted twenty gifted actors for this masterpiece. Why? Each part is essential and fully differentiated.

The Intensive characters include Boo Radley (Paul Jason Baker), mysterious and reclusive; Sheriff Tate (Jordon Born), decent and decisive; Calpurnia (Ruth Charlene Davis), the Finch's no-nonsense housekeeper; Helen Robinson (Tiffany Herndon), the concerned mother of the accused; Bob Ewell (Anthony Hodge), the abusive father of the alleged victim; Mrs. Dubose (Sandra Spurney), an ailing and opinionated widow; Judge Taylor (Mark Wright), who does what he can to ensure justice; and Walter Cunningham (David H. Horne) poor, prideful, and ultimately contrite.

Rounding out the cast are Mrs. Crawford (Heather Eggleston), Reverend Sykes (Ronald K. Haynes), and Maudie Atkinson (Shannon Shaw). Sally Pettegrew's costumes reflected the unsophisticated clothing of the region during the era.

The technical production team included Joe Kemper (Director), Spencer Carr (Stage Manager), Sara Stepp (Assistant Director), Tim Watson (Technical Director, Scenic and Lighting Design), Brady Corum (Assistant Technical Director), Sally Pettegrew (Costume Design), Mac Geers and Kaelan Kindy (Properties), Audie Gibson

(Light Board Operator), Kaelan Kindy (Sound Board Operator) and Matt King (Running Crew).

“To Kill a Mocking Bird” has attained its accolades as literature and drama for its realistic portrayal of a time in our history from which we have learned many lessons, but have still more to learn. Don’t miss the opportunity to see this classic brought to life.

