

12 Angry Men worth every dime

Brampton Guardian

Here's what you need to know about 12 Angry Men: You simply cannot get this degree of entertainment value from television, the movies and dare I say even from Toronto's most well-known theatres. It's the best \$30 you'll spend in a long time.

First— let's examine the facts about the second installment of the Rose Theatre's Summer Theatre Series. It's a tried-and-true story— one that has proven itself through its myriad of runs and remounts (and two awards as recent as 2005 for revivals) and, of course, with its engrossing subject matter. Patrons become flies on the wall during a jury deliberation of a homicide trial— a teenage boy facing the death penalty in the murder of his father. The play asks near the beginning: "What does a guilty man look like?" And as the story unravels, it's a question that becomes more and more relevant.

The fascinating conflict in the story comes when one dissenter, Juror No. 8, casts the lone "not-guilty" vote from the outset— despite evidence laid out in the trial that has convinced 11 other men to send a teenage boy to his death. Juror No. 8 (the jurors are not referred to by name) believes a reasonable doubt exists, and appeals to the other jurors to convince him otherwise. But in doing so, he plants a seed of doubt that ping-pongs between some jurors, and only serves to enrage others. And through the process, some of their own personal trials and tribulations come to light.

Where this particular presentation excels is in its ability to really penetrate that fourth wall while never really engaging the audience. Director Danny Harvey deserves a big nod for his execution (pardon the pun) of the story. You know the 12 jurors are in isolated lock-down, yet you feel part of the process without really being involved. We all drew sharp breaths at the same intense scenes (the final scene of act one was particularly forceful) and we all laughed on cue (despite the somewhat grim subject matter, there was a generous dose of subtle comedy peppered throughout) and we all focussed our attention— amazingly— on 12 different men at once (who had their attention focussed on only one man).

Also particularly enjoyable was that Harvey stayed true to the original 1954 New York setting— the wardrobe, the accents, the set and props all served as authentic. Consider an era of cigarette cases instead of smart phones— it felt right.

Casting for 12 Angry Men was solid, and Brampton's own Scott Carmichael mastered the role of Juror No. 8 with a sincere and spellbinding delivery. The best performance, in fact, I've seen from him on stage yet. Kudos also to Dan Karpenchuk as Juror No. 3 for a stunning and gritty performance as the fiercely agitated loose cannon of the group, who brings forth an essential deep and dark level of tension to the story.

While the entire cast is strong, I also have to note Julian Munds' wonderfully entertaining portrayal of Juror No. 7, and Rick Beaune's delivery of the pragmatic and even-tempered Juror No. 4.

The absolute worst part about 12 Angry Men, which runs at the Rose Theatre's Studio Two until July 27, is how quickly the play seems to be over.

That's all I can say in a negative light about the show.

When I first took my seat, I wanted to find fault in the staging and set up, because no matter where you are seated you are looking at the backs of actors' heads (and I've seen it done before with a different set-up)— but even that revealed itself as necessary— and ultimately extremely effective— in re-creating an authentic atmosphere.

So if, after reading this, you accuse me of calling 12 Angry Men a provocative, entertaining and well-implemented show with a stellar cast, I would have to answer to that: "Guilty as charged".

The show runs until July 27 with tickets on sale for \$29.

For more information, call 905-874-2800 or visit www.rosetheatre.ca.



The Rose Theatre is up for several awards in this year's BroadwayWorld.com Toronto competition.