

Backstage Pass

October 2009

Minnesota State
Theatre
& Dance

They're just *Twelve Angry Men*



The tensions and animosity that will soon explode in the jury room begin to take root in the jury box during trial.

The greatest tension is between Juror #8 (Robb Krueger, far left) and Juror #3 (David Wasylik, center). They must be held back by Juror #6 (Joey West, second from left), Juror #7 (Tucker Kern, seated) and Juror #5 (Ryan Thorsen).

Special thanks to the Blue Earth County Justice Center.

In the second Mainstage production, *Twelve Angry Men*, you see a story that began its life as a TV drama, then became a stage play and finally, twice, was a major motion picture. It's a story that deals in specific details of a jury trial while, at the same time, finds some of its heart in the fact that those rendering a decision about a young man's guilt or innocence are doing so not only based on the facts but also through influences of personal experience and bias. And they're doing so in a fairly anonymous way.

"I liked the message that this play

was portraying because I thought it was very relevant in our time right now," says director Paul Finocchiaro. "We have a lot of trials going on, and everyone is really invested in what goes on in the news.

"And I thought that if people could get a voyeuristic look into what happens in the jury room that they might have a little more understanding of what this 'beyond a reasonable doubt' phrase [that guides a jury] really means and what comes into play when coming to this decision 'beyond a reasonable doubt.'"

Finocchiaro has heard that what drove the resurrection of the musical *Chicago* several years ago was the O.J. Simpson trial, and the fact that the decision of "not guilty" made people question the jury process. By presenting this play in the round, with audience members on four sides of the actors on stage, he says, "I want the audience to feel like they are watching what's going on." In fact, he hopes each audience member will feel as if they are the 13th juror.

Continued on page 2

Continued: *Twelve Angry Men*: Script Specific

In the script, each character is distinctly drawn, right down to the physical characteristics the actor portraying him should have. For this reason, the 11 jurors, jury foreman and courtroom guard in the show are a diverse mix of physical types. What comes out during deliberations is that each is also a very distinct ethnic type who brings to the jury room personal history and bias that affects how he comes to his decision and what that decision is.

“The play is very succinct,” Finocchiaro says. “It’s innocent but it shows you what 1956 was like as far as people’s attitudes about youth, toward race relations, toward social status. All of those things really come into play, and I think that’s one of the things that makes it relevant.”

Playing Juror #8, a role made famous by Henry Fonda in the original feature film, is undergraduate senior Robb Krueger, who is making his Minnesota State Mankato debut.

“He’s a character who does a lot of shifting during the course of the show. At the beginning of the show he doesn’t really know why he wants to say ‘not guilty.’ It’s just an uneasy feeling that he isn’t sure,” Krueger says. “And everybody else has been convinced by the evidence [of the defendant’s guilt].”

Much of the play involves a re-analysis of the evidence with hopes by the other jurors that Juror #8 will come

“[The play] is innocent but it shows you what 1956 was like as far as people’s attitudes about youth, toward race relations, toward social status. All of those things really come into play, and I think that’s one of the things that makes it relevant.”

—Paul Finocchiaro

around and, like them, cast a vote of “guilty.” Because those other jurors have come to the decision for a variety of reasons—a desire to get back to their lives, the belief that because he’s a young man accused of killing his father he MUST be guilty, or simply because they don’t want to or are unable to think on their own—they can be persuaded by different arguments made by Juror #8.

Through the discussion, the jurors’ motives are slowly revealed.

The juror who is strongest in his opposition to Juror #8 is Juror #3, portrayed by David Wasylik who last year appeared as the main teacher, “Hector,” in *The History Boys*. It is revealed in the play that he has very personal reasons for feeling the young man is guilty.

“He’s the one who really takes it

personally because he has failed in raising his own son, his son who now hates him and hasn’t spoken to him in three years,” says Wasylik. “He now sees this as a form of justice in his own life to get back at this 19-year-old kid [on trial] and he’s very hard on him. He’s blinded himself by it. And then Juror #8 comes in and is killing him for it.

“He doesn’t like Juror #8 because Juror #8 is a nice guy. He’s smart. He’s doing it right.”

The “action” of the play takes place in a confined space, a small jury room on a very hot day. This will be represented in the Andreas Theatre with a long jury table in a room defined by a 30-inch-tall “wall” that includes the one door through which they enter and a window that provides a little fresh air.

Because this is very different from actually being in a small room, Finocchiaro started the rehearsal process in a much different place. The Department of Theatre & Dance has a conference room with a 10-foot conference table directly beneath the Andreas Theatre. Here, with the 13 actors, director, production stage manager and assistant stage manager, is where the rehearsal process began.

Krueger says he has carried that hot, stuffy, restricted feeling with him into the wide open spaces of the Andreas Theatre, and that this memory informs each of his character’s decisions.

—Mike Lagerquist

Theatre intimacy heightens connection between audience, actors

The size of the Andreas Theatre makes it a perfect space to present a show like *Twelve Angry Men* where a feeling of confined spaces enhances the script. The intimacy of the space, and the fact that it will be presented in the round, however, also means a stronger awareness of the audience by the actors.

Out of respect for the actors and

fellow audience members, please plan to arrive at the Performing Arts Center at least 15 minutes before curtain (the time on the ticket). The intermission will fall about one hour into the show, and the second act will be comfortably short. Anyone arriving after the show has begun will be seated when possible.

As always, please remember to turn off or silence cell phones and don’t text

message during the show. There were no cell phones in 1957, when the play is set, so we’d hate to have that technology make an appearance in the show.

Twelve Angry Men is not recommended for children (most productions are not recommended for children under six years of age).

We thank you for your continued patronage and your understanding.

Minnesota State Mankato Department of Theatre & Dance

Join us in New York City in March

As we have for more than 40 years, the Department of Theatre & Dance will take a tour to New York City during spring break, March 9-14 for those of you not familiar with the academic schedule.

We will leave in the morning (this is a change from previous years for you returning friends) on Tuesday, March 9, from the parking lot of the Performing Arts Center (although you can meet us at the airport if that is more convenient). We will depart New York for the return trip on the morning of Sunday, March 14.

The “trip” includes the plane, the shuttle to our NY hotel, the hotel, and back again. You can buy theatre tickets on your own (see below).

This year we are staying at the Wellington Hotel right on 7th Avenue and 55th St. It is on the northern end of the theatre district (right next to Carnegie Hall and across the street from the Carnegie Deli).

The cost is as follows:

- \$800 per person for a quad (four in a room)
- \$920 per person for a triple (three in the room)
- \$940 per person for a double (one bed)

- \$1,060 per person for a double (twin beds)

Obviously the more the merrier (or at least the cheaper).

A non-refundable deposit of \$100 is required by Dec. 1, 2009. Make the checks payable to “Paul Hustoles” (not MSU, or we will never get it out of the system!). The remainder of the fee will be due January 11, 2010.

It is possible to buy tickets NOW. We should get there in time for the Tuesday evening performance. Please note: many of the shows you might like to see will be available at the 1/2 price off TKTS booth. Don’t pay full price for any show that has been running for more than a year. You can check multiple websites (like nytheatre.com or Broadway.com) for the current shows and they will tell you what’s playing, although many of these will place a steep service charge on tickets purchased. I can let you know if a show might be available at the TKTS booth (exactly what the TKTS booth is, etc.).

On this “tour” you will be on your own. There is no schedule or agenda other than our departures. I will be available to help you find your way anywhere, do anything, etc. I will not



be conducting sightseeing tours of lower Manhattan. If you know me, you know that I have an opinion about everything, which I would be happy to share! I’ve been to New York dozens of times and pretty much know my way around.

I will hold a mini-seminar on “how to survive New York City” in early March. We will discuss what to pack, how to get around the city, sites of interest, anything you want.

Please feel free to contact me with ANY questions or concerns. My email (the best way) is paul.hustoles@mnsu.edu. Or you can call me during business hours at 507-389-2118.

We hope you can join us on our 41st trip to New York City!

We’re Looking forward to *A Christmas Carol*

We have now cast and are currently in rehearsals for our November production of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens as adapted by Paul J. Hustoles. What better way is there to get into the holiday spirit than by revisiting Ebenezer Scrooge and witnessing (again!) his transformation? Literally overnight!

We’ve got our family involved, and we hope you’ll bring your family as well. We’re offering performances at times and dates that we hope will fit into everyone’s schedule. Performances are: 7:30 p.m. Nov. 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21 and 28, plus 2 p.m. Nov. 14, 15, 21, 22 and 29. That’s right, you’ll have two opportunities on the Thanksgiving weekend!

Tickets may be bought now by following the link from the main page or the Tickets page at **MSUTheatre.com**. Even though music of the season has been added to our version, *A Christmas Carol* is being offered at the price of a play without music: \$14.50 regular, \$13 discounted and \$10 for current Minnesota State Mankato students. And because it’s being offered right here in Mankato, you can save the time and money that comes with traveling to the Twin Cities and make it back home much earlier.

As the show gets closer, visit us at **MSUTheatre.com** to find out more about the show, the cast, the designers and other things that will make the experience that much more enjoyable. *God bless YOU, every one!*