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Fine performances in Twelve Angry Men

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It takes courage to be the person with the unpopular opinion, and conviction to stand by that opinion under pressure.

For one man, his opinion means the difference between a murder conviction and freedom in the fascinating and engaging Twelve Angry Men, by Sherman Sergel, based on the Emmy Award-winning 1954 teleplay by Reginald Rose. The story also became a famous film starring Henry Fonda in 1957.

An interesting choice for Scarborough Player's premiere show of the season, this jury room drama features a cast of 13 men, 12 of which are the jurors in a New York City murder trial of a 19-year-old who is accused of stabbing his father to death.

What seems to be a cut and dry case of murder quickly becomes anything but when Juror 8 (Sean Ballantyne) decides to be the sole voter of "not guilty." This sparks outrage, especially in Juror 3 (David Cardinal), and kiboshes any hope of a short deliberation process.

Some of them, particularly Jurors 4 (Mike Woodbridge), 10 (Joseph Cochrane), 7 (Jim Hyslop) and Foreman (Kevin Shaver) strongly believe in his guilt, while Jurors 2 (Mena Massoud), 11 (Fabio Saposnik), 6 (Ben Trister) and 12 (Craig Estrella) are less certain.

Overall though, their belief of guilt is based on the testimony of two neighbours, the fact that it happened in a tenement, and that the teen is a "slum kid." But as they begin recreating events and picking apart witness testimony, there becomes more reasonable doubt than clear-cut guilt.

And as the jurors seesaw between guilty or not, tensions become heightened.

One of the first to turn is Juror 5 (David Merenick) who, having growing up in a tenement, thinks it's not reason enough to assume guilt. Juror 9 (Ian Fox) an older man, is next as he begins doubting the elderly neighbours' recall of events.

Reasons for guilt soon become individual prejudices come to light and it becomes apparent people are basing their opinions on their own life experiences instead of facts. It gets to the point where they begin turning on each other.

This story reveals how beliefs and experiences can colour objectivity and stir prejudices, and how these men have to find a way to put these things aside to get to the real truth.

Alexander Galant did double duty as director and set designer. As a short filmmaker, his talents in that area translated well into this stage piece, with both the show and the set realistic enough to make it feel as though you were watching a television movie.

Of course, the actors had a part in that and were intriguing to watch as an ensemble cast. There was a mix of veterans, like Woodbridge who is always a pleasure to watch, and newcomers like Hyslop, who went from behind the scenes to a great onstage debut. Security Guard (Robert Walker) and Saposnik also made impressive debuts to the stage.

Ballantyne was strong and passionate in his performance as the sole right-fighter, which for the most part was confronting ignorance and pleading for reason. He portrayed a person you would want to be on your jury if on trial.

This show had fierce intensity, offered convincing performances and was able to hold your interest for the entire time.

Twelve Angry Men's remaining shows are Sept. 17 to 19, 24 and 25 at 8 p.m. and 2 p.m. matinees Sept. 20 and 26, at the Scarborough Village Theatre, 3600 Kingston Rd. Tickets are $17, and $14 for seniors and students on Thursdays and Sunday only. For tickets, call 416-267-9292 or visit www.theatrescarborough.com

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