

TODAY'S WEATHER
 CLOUDY
 3 °C
 4 Day Forecast | Traffic

Friday, January 11, 2008 | Today's Toronto Star

PHOTOS VIDEO COLUMNISTS BLOGS PODCASTS RSS MOBILE NEWSLETTERS ALERTS



Search thestar.com Search the Web



HOME NEWS COMMENT BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIVING SCIENCE-TECH WHEELS.CA TRAVEL CLASSIFIEDS CAREERS

Movies | Music | Books | Television | Theatre | What's On | Game Reviews | DVD Reviews

REVIEW

Play still pushes our buttons

Jan 11, 2008 04:30 AM

RICHARD OUZOUNIAN
THEATRE CRITIC

Twelve Angry Men

★★★★ (out of 4)

By Reginald Rose. Directed by Scott Ellis. Until Feb. 10 at Princess of Wales Theatre, 300 King St. W. **416-872-1212**

- Email story
- Print
- Choose text size
- Report typo or correction
- Email the author
- License this article



Advertisement

CALL
1-888-WE-JOUST
 EXT.6

Medieval Times
 DINNER & TOURNAMENT

EXHIBITION PLACE, TORONTO - MEDIEVALTIMES.COM

When something works as well as the production of *Twelve Angry Men* that opened at the Princess of Wales Theatre last night, your first reaction is simply to give thanks.

It's really been far too long since we've seen a good old-fashioned, well-made play that's packed with interesting characters, spirited dialogue and high dramatic tension, but also has some serious moral points to make.

Add to the above virtues the performances of a first-rate cast and the firm but invisible direction of Scott Ellis and you have a solid-gold, shout-it-from-the-rooftops winner.

Reginald Rose's 1954 teleplay about a dozen jurors trying to decide the guilt or innocence of a young man accused of murdering his father has been remade many times over the years, but when you see it given the Rolls Royce treatment, you appreciate what a skilled piece of work it is.

When the jurors walk into the room, they are 11 to one in favour of conviction. Only a soft-spoken architect (Richard Thomas) pauses and starts asking questions. Before too long, the tide begins to turn and what was a foregone conclusion is now a nail-biting suspense drama.

But Rose is smart enough to give us more than that. A whole society is on trial here, accused of bigotry, small-mindedness and self-obsession. What's frightening about the script is that - with very few alterations - it could still take place in most North American cities today.

It's obvious that the young man on trial and his murdered father are both members of a minority group, but Rose cannily never reveals which one. Back in 1954, the venom could have been directed at blacks or Puerto Ricans. Today, the objects of hatred could be as wide as the world we live in.

During a week in which people were elected (or defeated) in American primaries because of their race, sex or religion, it's obvious that Rose's script can still push an audience's buttons.

There's no room, alas, to single out all of the 12 jurors by name, but believe me when I tell you that - at the final preview I attended - they were all doing an excellent job.

Thomas commands attention, not just because of his star status, but due to the fact that he's mastered the fine art of underplaying with strong conviction.

As an unassuming architect who suddenly turns a jury's mind around, Thomas uses intelligence, charm and moral commitment as his very effective weapons.

Julian Gamble and Kevin Dobson carry the brunt of the play's anger and bigotry, with Dobson delivering one of the most spine-chillingly racist speeches you've ever heard on a stage. Gamble may seem to bluster a bit too much at first, but he has a final scene that is suddenly and unexpectedly moving, and it makes up for his earlier excess.

Alan Mandell and David Lively are both witty, yet touching, as a pair of elderly men who prove themselves far younger in heart and mind than many of their colleagues, and Jeffrey Hayenga is a pleasure to watch as a stockbroker who seems to have ice water in his veins until it really matters.

And through it all, director Ellis shapes the material with a flawless touch, blending reality and artifice with a deft hand.

Twelve Angry Men is the kind of play they don't write any more and that's a pity.

It's engaging, entertaining and enlightening all at once: a triple-crown you don't encounter very often.

And it's the first must-see of 2008.

Advertisement

MORE IN ENTERTAINMENT

- Stardom fades, but cement lives on
- 'Persepolis': Drawing on reality
- About as wild as a dead buffalo
- Awards could get strike perks
- Eric Peterson's excellent
- Coroner can't tell cause of death
- Soulpepper basks in moonlight
- Art imitates life for Marjane Satrapi
- 'Name of the King': Does this lounge wizard take requests?
- Flick: our weekly take on movies

RECENT SPECIAL SECTIONS

- Toronto Boat Show
- Living Yoga
- Diabetes
- Desi Life, issue 5
- Guide to Colleges and Universities
- Florida Travel
- Caribbean Travel

More Specials

MOST POPULAR ON THESTAR.COM

Most Read Most Emailed

- Passengers scream as jet bucks, plunges
- Man critical after bus platform beating
- Leafs continue slide
- Leafs could learn from these guys
- Clinton's tears make Obama backers weep



This week's movies

Persepolis is an animated film about a young girl's coming of age amidst war, fascism and family tragedy. Read our review in this week's ...



Bryan Adams shoots GUESS

Musician and photographer Bryan Adams collaborated with GUESS by Marciano for the fashion brand's spring 2008 campaign, which ...



Women's Health section

Can environmental factors trigger cancer? Can your home and job make you sick? Learn the answers to this and other medical issues ...

[More Specials](#)

TheStar.com [Corrections](#) | [Contact Webmaster](#) | [FAQ](#) | [RSS](#) | [Desi Life](#)


Toronto Star [About Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Subscriber Self Services](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [News Releases](#) | [Star Internships](#) | [Careers at the Star](#)

Advertise With Us [Media Kit](#) | [Online Advertising](#) | [Print Advertising](#) | [Special Sections](#)

Initiatives [Santa Claus Fund](#) | [Fresh Air Fund](#) | [Classroom Connections](#)

Torstar Sites [toronto.com](#) | [ourfaves.com](#) | [Pages of the Past](#) | [Star Store & Photo Sales](#) | [New In Homes](#) | [More...](#)



 © Copyright Toronto Star 1996-2008 [Privacy Code](#) | [Site Map](#)