

# Meadow Brook creates warm characters

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" continue through Sunday, Nov. 25, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information, call the box office at 377-3300.  
By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer



**Cathie Breidenbach**

William Le Massena is a marvel as the backslapping, jovial father in the Meadow Brook production of Arthur Miller's tragedy "All My Sons." Director Charles Nolla brings out superbly the humor and humanity of Miller's characters.

Even the folks who live next door are intriguing as they make us laugh at the mundane foolishness and jealousies that make up their lives. Steven Anders, Jayne Houdgbell, Bethany Carpenter and J. Nathan French are aptly cast as the neighbors.

As Joe Keller, Le Massena displays small-town geniality so infectious that he could have been a salesman rather than a factory owner — which, of course, brings to mind Willy Loman in Miller's classic American play "Death of a Salesman."

Miller was one of the first to create a tragic hero who was an ordinary man, not a great king in classic tradition. Both Joe Keller and Willie Loman are average, middle-class American businessmen confronted with moral questions of tragic dimensions.

IN MANY WAYS "All My Sons" is a warm-up for "Death of a Salesman," the play Miller wrote after "Sons." Characters and themes are certainly first cousins. Both deal with a family of father, mother and two sons in moral crisis. Both tragedies indict the misplaced values of American business.

"Salesman" went on to become an all-time classic in American theater, yet "All My Sons" is seldom revived, probably because Miller's genius for showing us the flaws in our values is more heavy-handed in this earlier work.

Keller is a factory owner accused with his part-

ner of selling cracked cylinder heads to the government during wartime. Twenty-one pilots died when the faulty heads caused their planes to crash. Keller was sentenced to jail and later exonerated for the crime.

His son Chris, the young idealist who came home to work for his father after the war ended, needs to believe in his father's innocence. Peter Gregory Townsend is convincing as the serious young man trying to re-create a life for himself after the disruption of war.

He has invited a former neighbor, Ann, to visit because he wants to marry her. Linda Gehringer plays a fine, sensible Ann, the daughter of Joe's former partner who is still in jail for the cylinder-head crime.

THE MOTHER, Kate Keller, objects to the twosome, not because she doesn't like Ann, but because Ann was the "girl" of her other son who was reported missing-in-action three years ago. She refuses to believe that her son is dead.

Jane Lowry as the mother does an excellent job showing the conflicting loyalties of wife and mother that pull at Kate's sanity. Secrets lurk beneath the honey surface in this neighborhood reunion.

Meadow Brook set designer Peter Hicks built a house right on stage to frame the action which takes place on a warm day in the front yard of the

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Keller home. The grass looks freshly mowed, the screen door has fly specks and the wicker lawn furniture has seen many summers.

It's a wonderful set of the neighbor's home, to which Ann comes with marriage on her mind. She's not the only one to come back to the old neighborhood. Her brother George returns with vengeance on his mind after visiting his father in prison. George is played by Phillip Locker, who is a fine actor but is miscast in the part.

Rather than looking like Ann's big brother, a small-town kid who grew up to be a lawyer, he looks more like a tough, seasoned gangster. It's a minor flaw in this otherwise rewarding production. Meadow Brook's "All My Sons" successfully wrestles with the secrets and guilts that lurk beneath the veneer in this hometown, all-American family.



Lead role of Joe Keller is played with vigor by William LeMassena, in Meadow Brook's "All My Sons" by Arthur Miller.

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