

Meadow Brook carries torch with Miller's morality play

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By the middle of act one in Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "All My Sons," the notion that contemporary theater is foremost about providing mindless entertainment and appealing to the masses is resoundingly dismissed.

By then, the audience is fully wrapped into Miller's morality play, and the result is a roiling hope that the stage can be a social laboratory, whereby the great issues of life are contemplated and dramatized.

Choosing Miller's play couldn't have been easy. On the one hand, Miller is among the most revered playwrights of the 20th century. On the other hand, his work requires intense focus and an ability to navigate the torrents of powerful storytelling with characters often standing at the moral abyss.

And perhaps most telling about the state of theater, Miller's work deals with heavy, unfashionable themes like responsibility, morality and the

meaning of life. Not the kind of subject matter that attracts blockbusting crowds.

To their credit, Meadow Brook hasn't flinched from the challenge. Director Henry Woronicz, making his Meadow Brook debut, clears a path so the storytelling remains front and center.

And the storytelling in Miller's 1947 play unfolds with a tautness that reveals a master craftsman at work.

"All My Sons" was Miller's first critical and popular success. Two years later, he wrote "Death of a Salesman," followed by "An Enemy of the People," "A View From The Bridge," and "The Crucible."

"All My Sons" is set in post-war America, whereby idealism fostered by war heroes and practical realities faced by war profiteers are finding an uneasy alliance.

On the broadest level, the play is a moral dilemma created by two partners in a machine shop that sent out defective airplane engine parts causing the death of 21 men.

The guilty and more resourceful partner, Joe Keller (Dennis

What: "All My Sons," a three-act play by Arthur Miller.
When: Through Sunday, March 5; performance times vary, call the theater for information.
Where: Meadow Brook Theatre, Wilson Hall, Oakland University campus.
Tickets: \$19.50-\$35, call (248) 377-3300.

Robertson), pins the crime on his business friend. Like a cancer, the crime continues to eat away at the fundamental relationships of his family.

Meanwhile, one of Keller's two sons was killed in the war in an airplane crash, and his surviving son, Chris (Raymond L. Chapman), has returned home to work alongside his father, who has profited greatly from the war effort.

The drama is further complicated by Chris' love for his deceased brother's former girlfriend, Annie (Robin Lewis of Livonia).

Eventually, the truth is revealed to all, and the consequences laid bare to all those who fail to live up to their own moral responsibility.

Like the works of Shakespeare and Ibsen, Miller's words are

creates a compelling backdrop that invites audiences to peer over the wall into the Keller's backyard that soon turns into a moral quagmire.

The cast dons the restrained mannerism of the time, and invokes the intimacy of a compelling family drama. By the play's climax, the ensemble is indeed a representation of the family of man, twisted in an utterly strangling moral problem.

Moments between father (Robertson) and son (Chapman) are chillingly magical, as are the exchanges between brother (Raymond Schultz) and sister (Lewis), and mother (Mary Benson) and son (Chapman). Even the stargazing Frank Lubey (Scott Crownever), and the wise neighbor, Dr. Jim Bayliss (Geoffrey Beauchamp) elevate the relevance of the play.

While it's not easy to sustain the indignation at the heart of the play, Chapman's restless energy, and Robertson's calm, duplicity infuse each scene.

Director Woronicz proves repeatedly that he knows how to wring drama from the dynamic relationships in Miller's play.


In a region with an unfortunate lack of professional theater companies, Meadow Brook is the standard bearer. By choice or default, the university-affiliated professional theater company carries the heavy responsibility of making the public case for the invaluable role of theater.

Appropriately, with "All My Sons," Meadow Brook proved up to the task in carrying the torch.

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