

## Review

# Tennessee Rep Opens with a classic

By: Chad Young, *Nashville Parent*

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Tennessee Repertory Theatre's 27th season opener, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, is a tremendous production of a true piece of classic American theater.

It's not surprising that when *All My Sons* first hit Broadway in 1947 it nabbed two Tony Awards, including the award for Best Play. Of course, it doesn't hurt when you've got such thought-provoking material penned by one of the greatest playwrights in theater history. If that's not enough to get you to Tennessee Rep, then I don't know what is. It's not often enough that great classic American plays are presented here in Nashville.

Miller's script is based on actual events that transpired surrounding a man who sold faulty airplane parts to the U.S. Air Force during World War II. The character development in Miller's play is masterfully multilayered, and overall, the Rep's cast along with René Copeland's direction, bring the drama to gripping life on stage. In fact, *All My Sons* is one of the finest Tennessee Rep offerings in its nearly three-decade history.

Chip Arnold gives a stellar performance as Joe Keller, the play's main character whose wartime wrongdoing and subsequent cover-up not only affects the lives of 21 pilots but those of his own family, his business partner's family and the entire community where he lives — all in contrast to what he was willing to do in order to attain the classic mindset of the American dream.

Likewise, Ruth Cordell as Joe's wife, Kate, succinctly portrays her character's haunting emotional journey of living in denial. Cordell's role proves a pivotal one in the play when she dramatically reveals the implications of what the truth really means. Cordell's execution of this scene is powerful.

The most compelling performance front to back in the entire show comes from Eric D. Pasto-Crosby as Chris Keller. He magnificently commands every deep-rooted, unraveling emotional layer his character demands. In fact, this is Pasto-Crosby's greatest acting achievement to date.

All five of the main players — which also include Patrick Waller as the appropriately angst-ridden George Deever and Emily Landham as Ann Deever, who has a deep connection with the Kellers and possesses the ultimate truth — do a brilliant job of making their roles believable while engaging the audience to feel what those characters are experiencing. Despite a couple of minor blocking issues and a half-rendered slap to Joe's face by Kate, this is great overall ensemble work by all involved.

I can't sign off without mentioning an unfair directorial stroke at the play's end. Without giving anything away, the last scene of the play is undeniably tragic. Miller surely intended to send theatergoers away with plenty to discuss. So when the lights go down on the Rep's production and cheery music pipes in, the emotional heaviness the audience needs to absorb is thwarted. I say kill the music and let the audience feel the depth of emotion the playwright intended.

Once again, Tennessee Rep's outstanding design crew delivers, with Gary C. Hoff's detailed set creating a perfect slice of Americana. Trish Clark's costumes are beautifully constructed and true to the period, while Paul Carrol Binkley's sound and Phillip Franck's lighting are artful and effective.

The same can be said of Miller's exploration of lies and retribution. Yes, there are touches of melodrama, and Miller can be a bit preachy. But his message — and the richly drawn characters who deliver it — continues to register with today's audience.

Sadly, nearly 65 years later we remain all-too familiar with the grief of soldiers' mothers, and big business profiting from war. A modern-day tragedy, indeed.