

Theatre Review: All My Sons

The Drama Barn takes on an all-american classic of the theatre with All My Sons. [Oscar Bentley](#) sees how they rose to the challenge

Saturday 19 May 2018



Lydia Slack, Cullum Ball and James Chetwood in All My Sons. Photo Credit: Gareth Young

All My Sons is an acting showcase. This isn't a play for spectacle: it's a play of characters. Over the course of two hours, the change from a nuclear, if slightly broken, family, to one completely torn apart and irreversibly ruined is gripping and fascinating. It's a change which rests entirely on the performance of the actors however - they have nowhere to hide, so to speak - a challenge that this DramaSoc company more than rise to.

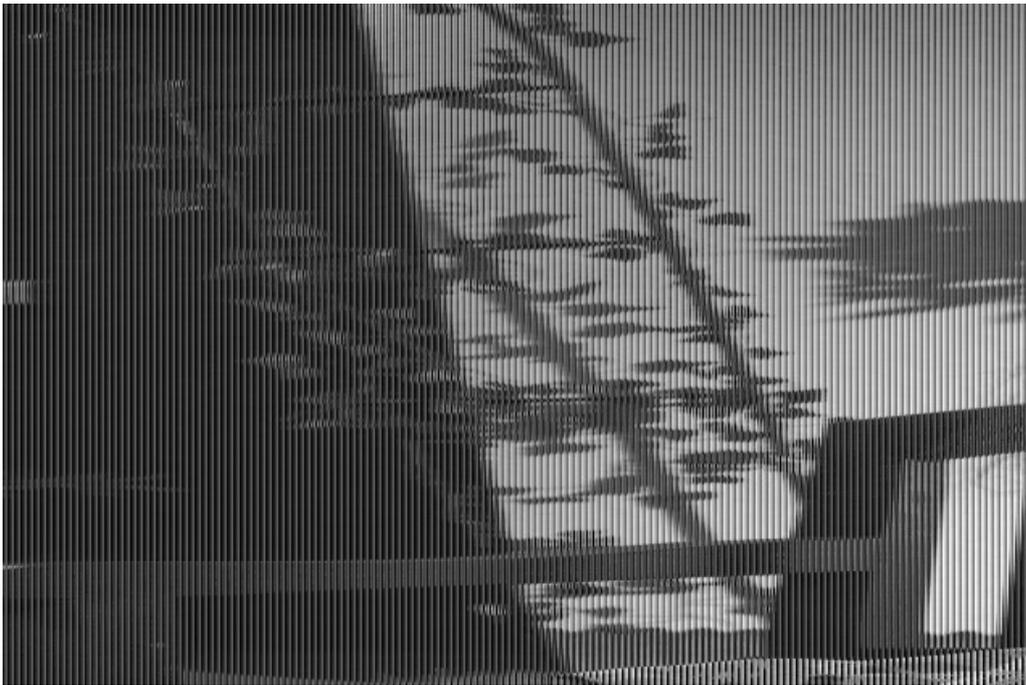
Set on one day over the course of three acts, All My Sons follows the Keller family in the aftermath of World War II. Mother Kate can't accept her eldest son Larry died in the war, but when Larry's old girl, Ann, arrives to marry Larry's younger brother, Chris, the family is torn apart by the truths that come out, all of which centre on Larry and Chris' father, Joe.

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The central quartet of Joe, Kate, Chris, and Ann carried the story for most of the drama's runtime. The actors give for the most part as good as and better performances than a professionally staged production

of the play I saw a few years ago, with the true stand out here being Alice Rowlatt's Kate, perfectly portraying the unhinged nature of a mother on edge, unable to accept the death of her son. Cullum Ball's Joe and Orla O'Hagan's Ann also both put in strong turns, as does James Chetwood as Chris, beginning Act I as a loyal but lovesick son, an idealist, and ending Act III as a man who rejects his family and his life as he's lived it thus far. There's an argument to be made for Joe, but *All My Sons* is Chris' play. It's his journey.

There's a fair bit of shouting in the second and (especially) third acts as the conflict ramps up, but all the players manage to keep this convincingly in character without feeling like they're going overboard. The supporting players also do well, although the choice to have Freya Ferguson's Sue perform in a British accent (rather than the American of the rest of the company) stood out a little.



Orla O'Hagan and Alice Rowlatt in *All My Sons*. Photo Credit: Gareth Young

All My Sons analyses the themes of responsibility and the American Dream. By no means Arthur Miller's best play – that accolade falls to *Death of a Salesman*, which takes these same themes and develops at them in greater depth – but here Joe Keller's lack of responsibility for his actions is his downfall. Again, like the aforementioned *Salesman*, Miller criticises the pursuit of American Dream over taking societal responsibility. It's a sentiment that got him called in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, but one that resonates as strongly today as it did in 1947.

The barn was fully decked out as the Keller's residence, although being much more of a garden and largely ignoring the porch which takes prominence in Miller's original text, with the real turf covering the floor always a nice touch to see, upping the production value. Choices made by directors Gabriel Dentoni and Martina Zucconelli also for the most part work: the music bridging Acts II and III was an ingenious decision, while a pair of dynamic lighting changes also stood out.

In *All My Sons*, DramaSoc succeeded in tackling one of the American greats.

9/10

All My Sons continues to run in *The Drama Barn* until Sunday night. For more information and to book tickets, visit www.yorkdramasoc.com



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