

Post WW II Trauma
 Port City Presents Miller's "Sons"
 By Brad Hathaway
 November 15, 2006

"Travel with us now back to the days . . . " might be the opening theme of the Port City Playhouse production of "All My Sons." It is something of a time machine to recapture what American drama was like some 60 years ago, presented in a solid if somewhat stilted staging.

In the days immediately following World War II, a number of new playwrights began to lay claim to public attention. Among them was Arthur Miller, who would go on to write "Death of a Salesman" and "The Crucible."

His first success was this look at a middle-class American family torn apart by both the combat experience of those who went off to war and the domestic and economic pressures on the home front. In Miller's hands, the story of a businessman charged with selling defective parts to the Army which resulted in the death of a number of fliers meshes with the fate of his two sons – one of whom didn't return from service in the Army Air Corps.

The pressure mounts as the mother of the boys continues to hold out hope that her lost son will return and as the truth comes out about just who really was responsible for the defective parts being shipped.

G. Smith plays the father with a strength that belies his history of arrest or the impact of the scandal on his business. As the evening progresses, he rails against revelations. Hans Dettmar is the surviving son who has unquestionably accepted his father's version of events until the discoveries detailed in the play.

For all the buildup from these two, however, somehow the explosion of emotion at the end just never materializes. When the father discovers the extent of the consequences of the actions he has tried to hide, the collapse of the façade Smith so carefully portrayed isn't evident. It makes the off-stage final act somehow more businesslike and less shocking.

The mother's real heroism in her defense of her husband is nicely represented in Laura Russell's performance, and Jessica Lada is quite good as she handles the rather complex role of the daughter of the assistant at the father's plant who was convicted in the scandal. She was also the girlfriend of the dead pilot, and now is the girlfriend of the other son.

Even if some of the dramatic impact of the finale seems a bit pallid, the production commands attention and holds the interest of the audience as the story plays out, and Miller's ultimate message is nicely delivered. Without putting too melodramatic an emphasis on it, the father sums it all up with the explanation that the pilots flying the planes with his equipment were "all my sons."

Brad Hathaway reviews theater in Virginia, Washington and Maryland as well as Broadway, and edits Potomac Stages, a Web site covering theater in the region (www.PotomacStages.com). He can be reached at Brad@PotomacStages.com.

Where and When

The Port City Playhouse production of "All My Sons" plays this Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Nannie J. Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson Street. Tickets are \$12 - \$14. Call 703-838-2880 or log on to www.portcityplayhouse.com.



"All My Sons."

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