

## **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**

Feb.27-March 18

Virginia Stage Company

Wells Theatre

(757)627-1234

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. To revisit this great American classic by Harper Lee is a richly rewarding experience. If you were a kid during the time frame of the play, as I am, it evokes memories of your own childhood in the shadows of the great depression.

Sales of her 1960 novel (the only one she ever published by the way) are in the mega -millions. The award winning film is still fresh and stimulating. This adaptation for the stage by Christopher Sergel, which has been around for a few years, is pretty much successful as well. You may miss a favorite scene or two but Mr.Sergel captures the main dramatic elements of the still powerful story of prejudice and injustice in 1932 Alabama.

As directed by Edward Morgan, this production wobbles a bit through some of the first act and lacks reality. He keeps a too tight rein on the children. Even so, they are delightful, especially Emma Vreler as the feisty tomboy Scout. Avery Bolander is her brother Jem and Jesse Hanna is Dill. All three are capable of having much more summer fun as kids than Morgan allows them to have. In a performance that is too calculated and mannered, garnished with a molasses heavy southern accent, Kate Udall speaks directly to the audience as the adult Scout recalling her youth. Unfortunately, she doesn't impel the story with any excitement or emotional impact Kevin Cutts finds his own way of playing Atticus Finch and it basically works. I do wish director Morgan has helped him find more of the warmth and wisdom of this arresting character. Perri Gaffney as the Finch housekeeper gives a well thought out , detailed performance.

Act II is made up primarily of the trial of Tom Robinson for the rape of Mayella Ewell. Stephen Tyrone Williams is deeply moving and believable as Tom and Natalie Knepp as the pathetic Mayella turns in what comes close to being the outstanding performance in the production. Act II finds its theatrical legs. Throughout the trial the audience was completely absorbed and engrossed with the proceedings. There are also noteworthy performances by Patrick Brady, Robert Nelson and William Zielinski among others.

Bill Clarke's set is primarily about a really big tree. One might argue that it limits variety of acting areas but it offers a neat economy.A. Nelson Ruger IV lights it well although I never felt the Alabama summer heat. Jeni Schaefer's costumes seem a little unrumpled and unlined in for poor depression folk going through a long hot summer.

While this production is not without flaw, the spirit of Harper Lee is preserved and still speaks to us with the force of a very fine writer.

I'll confess something. When I was about ten years old, quite by accident, I shot and killed a mockingbird with my BB gun. I lived in holy terror for months knowing that I would go straight to hell if I died. This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening..