Joe Keller Sr. (Chris Kanaga) and Kate Keller (Danielle Dwyer) with their oldest son, Chris Keller (Ryan Winkles), in Arthur Miller's "All My Sons." PHOTO / HANS OLSEN

'All My Sons' comes to Orleans

Elements Theatre's production of Arthur Miller's award-winning play "All My Sons," directed by Oxford School of Drama professor Joanna Weir Ouston, will be performed at 7:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and 3 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 11 through Nov. 20, at Paraclete House at 5 Bay View Drive in Orleans. Tickets are $25 to $65 and can be purchased by calling (508) 240-2400 or visiting elementstheatre.org.

In post-World War II America, the return of a family friend starts a string of events that leads the Kellers — a family crippled by loss, denial and secrets — to exposure and painful consequences, confronting secrets and lies that are too big to be forgiven. Every word and every action in this gripping, timeless classic has consequences.

"All My Sons" was Miller's first major success as a playwright in 1947, winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and Tony Awards for best author and for best direction of a play. Today, its politics and its impact remain as relevant and devastating as ever.

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The Barnstable Patriot

'All My Sons' evokes themes of greed, guilt at Elements Theatre in Orleans

By Johanna Crosby / news@barnstablepatriot.com

Posted Nov 16, 2016 at 1:47 PM
Updated Nov 16, 2016 at 1:49 PM

The idyllic set of the backyard of the Keller household in Elements Theatre Company's production of Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" is beautifully rendered with a sprawling porch off the clapboard house, white wicker furniture and a charming gazebo on a manicured lawn. The inviting scene belies the sense of uneasiness and turmoil that smolders under the surface. The Kellers seem to enjoy cordial relationships with their friendly neighbors, who drop by unannounced to chat and pass the time of day. But there's an unspoken truce, not to mention uncomfortable subjects from the past.

Miller's 1947 Pulitzer Prize-winning play is a gripping family drama that slowly unfolds, with the first act functioning as the setup for a second act that explodes with a series of jarring truths and dark family secrets. Based on a true post-war story, Miller explores the themes of greed and guilt and pits family loyalty against moral responsibility as his characters are forced to grapple with the consequences of their life choices.

Years earlier Joe Keller, the owner of a small Ohio manufacturing factory, was exonerated from charges that he knowingly sold defective aircraft parts to the military during World War II, causing the deaths of 21 pilots. His partner and friend takes the rap and goes to prison. The Kellers' older son Larry has been missing in action for three-and-a-half years, but Joe's wife, Kate, lives in deep denial that he is dead. The middle-aged couple has settled into the good life until Larry's girlfriend, Ann, arrives for a surprise visit. She's developed a relationship with their younger son Chris, and the couple announce that they are going to get married, which upsets Kate.

Elements guest director Joanna Weir Ouston of England' s Oxford School of Drama deftly draws finely etched performances from a capable ensemble cast. Christopher Kanaga's Joe is a glib, personable man who's made concessions in life that he's able to live with for the sake of his family and the success of his business. Sr. Danielle Dwyer delivers a multi-layered portrayal of his wife, Kate. The actress gives a truly authentic performance, effectively conveying her character's vulnerability as well as her steely strength. She makes Kate's grief painfully palpable but also shows her manipulative side.

Ryan Winkles commands the stage as Chris, an idealistic veteran who has difficulty adjusting to the complacency of life back home after the war. Chris idolizes his father and is shattered when he learns the truth. The confrontation between father and son is riveting.

Stephanie Haig is appealing as Ann Deever, an attractive young woman who longs to be loved. Peter Haig is convincing as Ann's broken brother George, who bears the burden of being the messenger of the truth and bearer of bad news. The leads are flanked by a fine supporting cast.

"All My Sons" raises intriguing questions about the rationalizations and compromises we sometimes make and their repercussions on the ones we love and the world beyond. The lovely set, period costumes and music evoke the post-war era.

Masterful Production Of 'All My Sons' At Elements Theater Co.

16 November 2016

By: Ellen Petry Whalen

Chris Keller with Ann Deever in “All My Sons” At Elements Theatre Company. COURTESY PHOTO

With a salute to Veteran’s Day, “All My Sons” explores the many sacrifices made during World War II. With Arthur Miller’s enduring writing and portrayal of universal struggles, this drama’s powerful message still resonates today.

Miller believed theater could “change the world.” His break-out play, “All My Sons” wrestles with the changing social fabric of post-World War II and man’s responsibility to other men. Premiering on Broadway in 1947 when Miller was only 31, it won two Tony Awards,

including Best Author (his first of two, with “Death of a Salesman” being his second). Elements Theatre Company’s portrayal of this masterful play is nothing less than stellar.

Joe Keller is a blue-collar man at heart who, embodying the American Dream, rose through the ranks from laborer to successful factory owner. Christopher Kanaga plays him with the likability of a man’s man that belies the demons that haunt him.

Sister Danielle Dwyer is Joe’s wife, Kate, who refuses to believe their son Larry died in the war three years earlier after he went missing during a flight mission. Dwyer masterfully maintains Kate’s veil of denial while constantly controlling all aspects of her and her family’s lives, whether using her amazing charms or her sheer will to do so.

Ryan Winkles portrays the Kellers’ remaining son, Chris, who is heir to the family’s fortunes. Winkle compellingly depicts Chris’ internal struggles — wanting to keep the peace and not confront his mother’s denial, but also needing to move on with his life. He represents the family’s hopes for the future, and through his idealism, Chris is held in high regard by many, in direct contrast to his father’s tarnished reputation after the factory was held accountable for faulty manufacturing.

Ann Deever is the daughter of Joe’s imprisoned business partner, who is serving time for releasing defective engine parts that brought about the death of 21 World War II pilots. Stephanie Haig exemplifies the classic girl-next-door virtues, as her character Ann is symbolic of hope and renewal — having been promised to Larry but now being courted by his brother Chris.

Elements’ attention to detail is noteworthy throughout the drama, but upon entering the theater, one is instantly captivated by the spectacularly looming set of the Keller home and realistic yard. The meticulously constructed first and second floors of the colonial fade into solely framed windows on the third floor, suggestive of a much less grounded and defined future for the Keller family.

Elements’ acting troupe is traditionally directed by Dwyer, but once in a while they have a guest director. From Britain’s Oxford School of Drama, international director Joanna Weir Ouston highlights the relatable and ordinary qualities of Miller’s characters who are put in extraordinary situations. The whole cast of 13 embodies this sentiment, which ultimately makes the characters’ action less black and white, especially as the Kellers struggle with their duty to family versus their duty to society and whether the ends can justify the means.

As always, Elements’ costumes are works of art, especially the women’s handmade dresses that are richly adorned with diamond buttons, and historically correct, fuller skirts, exemplifying the greater availability of fabric, after war rationing.

Filled with a web of lies, guilt, and ultimately, the search for the hope and truth, Elements’ “All My Sons” is an intensely dramatic and praiseworthy portrayal of Miller’s early masterpiece.

Details:

“All My Sons”

CAPE COD TIMES

Entertainment

Element Theatre's 'Sons' absorbing, well-told tale

By Cindy Nickerson / Contributing writer

Posted Nov 12, 2016 at 12:45 PM
Updated Nov 12, 2016 at 12:46 PM

ORLEANS — Element Theatre Company's production of Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" opened on Veterans Day — perfect timing for a play concerning the aftermath of World War II events.

But this Pulitzer Prize-winning drama elegantly explores a question so ancient it was posed with callous flippancy by the first son ever. Cain — Adam and Eve's eldest — asks, after killing No. 2 son, Abel: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Where does our obligation to care for and protect stop? With ourselves or our family? Or does it extend to our community, our country or even the world?

Under the guest direction of Joanna Weir Ouston from England's Oxford School of Drama, Element's production faithfully evokes the post-war period within the confines of a prosperous small-town Ohio family's secluded backyard — a trim and tidy place of trellises, wicker lawn furniture and wall-to-wall grass. There's a kind of intense clarity to the virtually flawless acting, set and costumes that brings the message home in high definition, giving it the aspect of a Greek tragedy.

In a way, this production seems almost too polished and antiseptic, detracting — ever so slightly — from its humanity and power. Still, it's a thoroughly absorbing tale, extremely well-told and worth pondering.

A protagonist of truly classical proportions, Joe Keller (Christopher Kanaga) is a very personable and prosperous manufacturer, with his plant turning out things like pressure cookers and washing machines. But he became successful producing aeronautical parts for the military during the war.

Life is pretty good for him and his wife, Kate (Danielle Dwyer), except that their son Larry was reported missing in action 3½ years ago. Kate remains in resolute denial concerning his all-too-certain death. When the apple tree planted in his memory breaks off in a storm, she interprets it as a sign he'll still return. Obviously, it was planted prematurely, she reasons.

As the play opens, the Kellers' other son, the idealistic Chris (Ryan Winkles), has invited Ann Deever (Stephanie Hair) — who formerly lived next door and was engaged to Larry — to visit. He's been writing to her for two years and wants to propose. This raises the level of tension in the household as Kate can't tolerate the notion of Ann forsaking Larry.

Ann's presence also summons specters from the past. Her father, Joe's former partner, is in prison for patching up and shipping out faulty cylinder heads for aircraft engines – an action resulting in 21 pilots crashing to their deaths. We learn Joe, too, was convicted and did some time, though later exonerated and able to redeem his reputation. However, the family's façade of normalcy crumbles as the lies and secrets that have been propping it up begin to emerge.

As Joe, Kanaga is engaging enough that we're able to sympathize, even considering his character's bad choices, made in the noble name of "family." Initially, his Joe seems younger and fresher than experiences might indicate (even accounting for his ability to compartmentalize past actions); but Kanaga effectively reveals layers of sadness, panic, rage and anguish as time passes.

Dwyer's turn as Kate is convincing and multidimensional. Even at first we see traces of humor and caring mixed with her determination to hold out superstitious hopes for Larry's return. She seems weak. But later we see the strength behind her self-deception.

Winkles is excellent as Chris, a kind of shining knight walking about in suspenders with, perhaps, a certain blindness to reality. He gets to utter some dazzling lines. "I know you're no worse than other men, but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man ... I saw you as my father," he cries out to Joe. And, again, "Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world?"

Haig makes a lovely Ann, a person perhaps purer in her choices than any of the others. The supporting cast is very fine as well, with Peter Haig playing a particularly significant role as Ann's brother, George.

It's believed "All My Sons" was inspired by an actual incident Miller read about in a newspaper article: a conspiracy between management at an aeronautical firm and Army inspectors to certify faulty aircraft engines. The pressure to produce for the war effort was intense, with the possibility of failure significant if a company lost its military contract. So Joe Keller's decisions weren't easy, and perhaps not black and white. And we often think ours aren't either.

Or are they? Miller — to be sure — lays out the challenge.

NOTE: In conjunction with its Sunday matinees, Element is serving a 1 p.m. lunch ($30, reservations required) beforehand and talk-backs with cast members following the performances.

WICKED LOCAL BREWSTER

Entertainment & Life

Theater Review: 'All My Sons' at Elements

By Lee Roscoe

Posted Nov 18, 2016 at 2:01 AM

Arthur Miller's "All My Sons," at Elements Theatre Company depicts an essential tragedy of American life: the dysfunctional matrix of capitalism and what it does to the human heart when to provide for your family you must make compromises that corrupt the soul and ruin the larger world.

The play opens as a windstorm has cracked the tree planted to commemorate Larry Keller, gone missing during World War II. His parents, Joe and Kate Keller, believe he is still alive. Idealistic brother Chris has returned from the war, working for his father's successful firm, reluctantly.

Chris has invited Ann, Larry's fiancée, whom they've both known since childhood, back home to ask her to marry him.

The larger than life façade of the suburban house of the American Dream looms over the characters, embodying what Joe, self-made businessman has sought to achieve, and what has trapped him.

Miller's classic Aristotelean structure unifies time and place, as normality is stripped away layer by layer to reveal the destructive deceits at the Keller family core.

We watch a gut wrenching dissolution of a human being and his family, torn between love and the sickening truth.

This gem of a repertory company again wows with its acting range and versatility. Christopher Kanaga is a powerhouse as Joe, the charismatic, uneducated, working class hero, undone by his choices. Kanaga has often partnered Brad Lussier's stellar Shakespearean performances (Anthony to his Julius Caesar, Kent to his Lear).

In this play Lussier portrays an authentic Doctor Bayliss, a chorus to the action, whose concession to his embittered wife (N. Kate Shannon) rather than to his passions for research have made him a good man but a failed one.

Danielle Dwyer, co-founder of Elements, performs Kate's obduracy, the constructs of signs and portents she has given herself to stay alive without going mad, with an almost Lady MacBethian vigor and sensibility. Ryan Winkles as Chris completely convinces and moves us as army hero, suitor and loving son. Stephanie Haig's Ann is right out of the 40s -- pragmatic, smart, stylish, lonely.

If You Go

What: 'All My Sons,' a play by Arthur Miller

Where: Elements Theatre, Paraclete House, 5 Bay View Drive, Orleans

When: Nov. 18, 19

Tickets: Starting at $25; free for students, 508 240 2400 or elementstheatre.org

BWW Review: ALL MY SONS: An Entreaty To Be Better

by Nancy Grossman Nov. 17, 2016

All My Sons
Written by Arthur Miller, Directed by Joanna Weir Ouston; Stage Manager, Sr. Mercy Minor; Lighting Design, Scott Stipetic; Sound Design, Daniel Pfeiffer, Rachel McKendree, Sr. Phoenix Catlin, Mike Hale; Scenic Design, Peter Haig, Charity Spatzeck-Olsen, Mary Virginia Smith; Costume Design, Gail Gibson, N. Sharon Tingley, Karlene Albro, Belinda Schmitt, Michelle Rich, Holly Dubocq, Jackie Hempel; Properties, Sr. Huai-Kuang Miao, Sr. Abigail Reid
CAST: Christopher Kanaga, Sr. Danielle Dwyer, Ryan Winkles, Stephanie Haig, Peter Haig, Brad Lussier, N. Kate Shannon, Kyle Norman, Heather Norman, Justin McKendree, Bob Rich, Michelle Rich, Br. Richard Cragg
Performances through November 20 by Elements Theatre Company at Paraclete House, Rock Harbor, Orleans, MA; Box Office 508-240-2400 or www.elementstheatre.org

Arthur Miller wrote *All My Sons* in 1947, a vantage point from which he could look back at World War II America and examine profiteering, the loss of life, and how the American Dream became a nightmare for one family. Set in an Ohio backyard in August, 1946, everything that appears normal and mundane on the surface is a shakily-constructed facade waiting to crumble when secrets are revealed. Seventy years later, there is still much to be learned from this compelling, Tony Award-winning play, and the Elements Theatre Company production doesn't shy away from the ugly truths or raw emotions embedded in Miller's story.

Guest director Joanna Weir Ouston, a teacher and director at Oxford School of Drama, returns to Orleans to guide the stellar cast of Elements artists whose work is truly worthy of the word ensemble. The drama concerns the Keller family - Joe (Christopher Kanaga), his wife Kate (Sr. Danielle Dwyer), and son Chris (Ryan Winkles) - and the neighbors on either side - Dr. Jim Bayliss (Brad Lussier) and his wife Sue (N. Kate Shannon), and Frank and

Lydia Lubey (Kyle and Heather Norman). Former neighbor Ann Deever (Stephanie Haig) is now Chris' love interest and visiting on his invitation, and her brother George (Peter Haig) unexpectedly arrives late in the day with unwelcome news. An opening montage crafted by Weir Ouston showcases the convivial nature of the families before the war, searing the happy, innocent images onto our minds' eyes, in contrast to what will eventually transpire. Miller got the idea for the play from a newspaper story about corruption at an aeronautical plant in Ohio where senior corporate people had conspired with army inspection officers to certify faulty engines for use in military aircraft. There was a lot of money to be made producing parts for the military, but the pressure was intense to get the job done quickly. Miller took the theme as the core of *All My Sons*, but expanded it into a morality tale. Joe Keller's plant produced faulty parts, shipped them to the Army Air Force for use in combat planes, and 21 servicemen died when their planes went down. However, it was Joe's business partner Steve Deever who took the fall and went to prison, although a cloud of suspicion lingers over the Keller household. Tangled in the web of blame and responsibility, the Keller's elder son Larry is MIA and presumed dead by all but his mother. What, if any, connection does his death have to the faulty equipment? That and other questions loom, steadily raising the pressures within the family, like steam in a sealed pot that must be vented or explode.

Act one introduces the characters, maps the relationships, and lays the groundwork for later disclosures. Although it may be intentional to lull the audience into thinking that the Kellers are enjoying their leisure as the fruit of Joe's labors, the languid pacing makes the hour-long act play longer and I had the feeling that I was waiting for someone or something that was inexplicably delayed. Fortunately, developments are much more fleet-footed in the second act when George shows up after visiting his father. Each character has a reaction based on their willingness to accept or deny what George has to say, which is informed by what they already know or believe to be true, but relationships are inexorably altered as the drama builds to its explosive denouement.

All My Sons is one of Miller's great writing achievements and it requires strong performances to plumb its depths. Sr. Danielle Dwyer reaches unbelievable depths in her portrayal of Kate Keller who, at times, seems irrational, yet is truly the wise one who understands exactly what is at stake if truth were to be snatched from the bonds of her denial. She makes us feel the pain and strength of this matriarch who bends, but refuses to buckle in the face of overwhelming evidence of a parent's worst nightmare. Kate is the heart and soul of this damaged family and serves as a fulcrum on which no amount of force can budge her from her stance. Her journey is often difficult to watch, but Dwyer compels us to give her our unwavering attention.

Christopher Kanaga gives a multi-faceted performance as Joe Keller, putting on a happy face even as he struggles to come to terms with his culpability and denial. Kanaga makes it clear that Joe loves his family, but doesn't always choose the best actions to show it. This plays out especially well in his scenes with son Chris (Ryan Winkles) who is set up as an idealist and the moralist in the family. Winkles gives Chris an appropriate earnestness, and is sweetly tender and coy proclaiming his love for Ann. He is convincingly dismayed when the unraveling begins and his simmering anger builds into a throat-searing rage when the final invective is launched.

Stephanie Haig displays a wide range as Ann, from her soft, loving scenes with Chris, to the conflicted emotions she feels when Chris and her brother quarrel, to showing steely resolve with Kate. As George, Peter Haig seethes and exhibits feelings of urgency to get his sister away from the Keller clan. When he softens his stance, the turn seems rather sudden and unsubstantiated, but his later reversal appears genuine. The rest of the cast provides solid support. Brad Lussier is the reliable family friend and voice of reason as Dr. Jim Bayliss, and N. Kate Shannon makes his no-nonsense wife Sue a stern taskmistress. Kyle Norman and Heather Norman are good neighbors who provide a bit of levity and cheer, and Justin McKendree has an honest-to-goodness quality as young Bert, the neighborhood kid who looks up to Joe. Additional company members are Bob Rich, Michelle Rich, and Br. Richard Cragg.

The Elements design team invites us into the homey world of the play with a 1920s house and an evocative backyard filled with garden furniture and a trellised arbor, costumes and hairstyles true to the post-WW II era, and 1940s music. Weir Ouston directs the play with an understanding, sympathetic view of each of the characters and their actions. She puts forth the playwright's challenge to the audience to consider how any of us might act in the same circumstances. Judging by the somber vibe in the room during the post-show talkback, the play's moral themes weighed heavily in the aftermath of the 2016 election. One of the most disturbing facts about *All My Sons* is that it is based on an actual war-time event, and it stirs up thoughts about profiteering by large corporations in other, more recent wars.

Thematically, the juxtaposition of the self-sacrifice required by those who served and the financial killings made by some who supplied tools for the effort raises the question of why they fought the war. Was it to maintain the status quo, or was it for the greater good? And aren't these the very same questions being asked today as another generation of young people will be forever changed by the wars they are fighting? In the final scene, Chris admonishes his mother, "You can be better! Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it..." Let us all take those words to heart.