

Play Review: Verdict is in on *Anatomy of a Murder*

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I'd read the book, I'd seen the movie twice, and I definitely knew how the story ended. But this reviewer was still captivated by the case that unfolds in Players de Noc's production of *Anatomy of a Murder*.

Based on Robert Traver's novel of the same name, *Anatomy of a Murder* was inspired by events that took place in Marquette County in the early 1950's. Attorney Paul Biegler (Jim Soderberg) returns from a fishing trip to find himself caught up in the case of his life. Army Lieutenant Frederick Manion (Mark Ammel) is accused of the cold-blooded murder of a bar owner who allegedly raped the lieutenant's wife (Krista Stroud). Biegler and his old pal Parnell McCarthy (Joe Pepin) set out to convince the jury that Manion is not guilty by reason of insanity. To prove this risky defense Biegler must overcome intense dislike for his client, polish the less-than-pristine reputation of Manion's wife, and win over surly bartender Paquette (Jeff Woerpel). All while countering legal blows from Biegler's rival, District Attorney Mitch Lodwick (Steve O'Driscoll), and his slick sidekick from the state capitol, Claude Dancer (Mark Cowman).

Things really get interesting when court is called to session by the bailiff (Kelly Pepin) and a series of colorful characters enter the courtroom. Coroner Dr. Homer Raschid (Marc Esqueda), photographer Hannah Burke (Jenny Warner), Detective Sgt. Julian Durgo (Ed Dwyer), psychiatrists Dr. Matthew Smith (Chad Gillmet) and Dr. W. Harcourt Gregory (Chris Lund) offer their testimonies. Presiding over it all with a droll sense of humor is Judge Weaver (Chris Holmes). And Ken Benson makes a delightful cameo as Mr. Lemon, the caretaker.

Anatomy of a Murder engages its audience on many levels. There's the true-crime fascination as details of the rape and murder come to light. The human drama when we see major players as both sympathetic and despicable. The familiarity of local references to Lake Superior and the Upper Peninsula. And the fun of the witty banter that peppers the show and keeps everyone from taking themselves, or the heavy subject matter, too seriously.

Jim Soderberg shines as defense attorney Paul Biegler, delivering one liners with deadpan panache. He, along with Mark Cowman as the lead prosecuting attorney, deserve special recognition for spouting pages of legal jargon without missing a beat. But ultimately the play is successful due to the strength of the ensemble.

A hundred small things contribute to making *Anatomy of a Murder* one heck of a good show. Lt. Manion's love affair with his fancy cigarette holder. The cat's eye glasses and the crew cuts. The 20+ beautiful wood chairs that grace the courtroom (courtesy of Heynssens & Selin's). And the actors who sit through long stretches of court

proceedings without ever breaking character. (My personal favorite is the crossword-loving court reporter, played by Brad Bender.) Kudos to Director Pete Dzanbozoff, Stage Manager Kelly Smith, Costumer Jolie Dzanbozoff, Props Person Carolyn Beauvais, and Lighting Designer Ed Dwyer.

Buy a ticket, bring a friend, and sign up for jury duty when you come in the door. No newspapers allowed, but the catering is supposed to be killer.

Performances will be held at the William Bonifas Center Theater April 25, 26, May 1, 2, 3, 2008 at 8:00 pm, April 27 Matinee at 2:00 pm. Tickets are available at Gust Asp or in limited quantities at the Gladstone SuperValue. Tickets will also be sold at the Box Office ½ hour prior to showtime.