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12 guys and a courtroom

Butler hopes film's popularity will attract audiences to Twelve Angry Men

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter
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Stuart Martin, Rob McIntyre, Bill Van Gorder (back), Darrel O'Neil, and Phil Reid rehearse a scene from Twelve Angry Men, the classic drama about a jury at odds about a murder case, at the Pond Playhouse in Halifax last week. Theatre Arts Guild is mounting the show from June 17 to July 3. (Ingrid Bulmer / Staff)

The last time Angela Butler directed a play she had a cast of six women.

This time around, she's got a cast of 13 men.

Butler directed the Theatre Arts Guild production of Belles in 2007 and she's at the helm of the guild's Twelve Angry Men which opens Thursday at the Pond Playhouse, 6 Parkhill Rd., Halifax.

Written by Reginald Rose, the courtroom drama runs Thursdays to Saturdays at 8 p.m. to July 3. There are matinees June 26 and 27 and July 3 at 2 p.m.

Many people are familiar with Twelve Angry Men, which was made into a film starring Henry Fonda in 1957, earning three Oscar nominations, says Butler.

"It's set in a jury room in the mid-1950s. A young man is on trial for murder and if he's found guilty he will be put to death in the electric chair," she says.

"The jury deliberates the case, but you don't see the accused. He could be of any group. There are references to him being a minority, Hispanic or black, but we don't know. One gentleman on the jury is very bigoted and not afraid to say it, and it gets worse as the play goes on and his bigotry bothers almost everyone."

A big fan of classic films like To Kill A Mockingbird or Inherit the Wind, Butler was familiar with the movie version of Twelve Angry Men which marked Sidney Lumet's directorial debut.

"It didn't do well at the box office, but it became a classic over time," she says.

Butler hopes the name recognition will draw people to the theatre for a summer show.

The native of Lewisporte, N.L., who now lives in Mount Uniacke, was surprised to have 31 men audition for the play, which she believes is a guild record. The cast includes veterans and men who have never acted before. They range in age from their 20s to their 60s and come from many occupations.

CLASSIC DRAMA:

Twelve Angry Men

What: A courtroom thriller, produced by Theatre Arts Guild

Where: Pond Playhouse, 6 Parkhill Rd., Halifax

When: June 17 to July 3, Thursdays to Saturdays at 8 p.m. with 2 p.m. matinees June 26 and 27 and July 3.

Written by: Reginald Rose

Directed by: Angela Butler

Starring: Jamie Boyer, John Bullock, Terry Coolen, Colin DeWolfe, Frank MacLean, Stuart Martin, Rob McIntyre, Darrel O'Neil, Phil Reid, Lowell Shore, Mike Tobin, James Williams and Bill VanGorder

Tickets: \$16, \$13 for guild members/seniors/students. Available at: the Ticket Atlantic box office at the Halifax Metro Centre, call 451-1221; 17 participating Atlantic Superstore outlets, www.ticketatlantic.com, at the door.

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Though set in the 1950s, Butler believes the emotions that surface in the play are still felt today.

"Biases and prejudice still exist," she says, adding jurors are still troubled by doubt and can be swayed by peer pressure.

"There's a lot of anger in the play and the characters are very real. People may know someone like them. And there's a lot of very rapid-fire dialogue."

One of the biggest challenges was having 12 men on a very small stage for the entire show.

"It's like choreographing a dance."

Since making her theatrical debut as an actor in Dartmouth Players' production of Reserve Two For Murder in 1996, Butler has gone on to star in about two dozen plays with Dartmouth Players, Theatre Art Guild and independent productions. She also directed Skylight in 2006 for the guild.

Her next theatrical endeavour is also as a director of the guild's annual pantomime Beauty and the Beast at Christmastime.

Tickets for Twelve Angry Men are \$16, \$13 for students, seniors and members of the guild. They are available at the Ticket Atlantic box office at the Halifax Metro Centre, 451-1221, online at www.ticketatlantic.com and at participating Atlantic Superstores.

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