

British Theatre Guide

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Inherit the Wind

Jerome Lawrence & Robert Lee

Tricycle Theatre. Kilburn

(2006)

Where a group of thirty amateurs, twenty of which are leading lawyers and a High Court Judge, indulge in a performance of a play that has been reproduced in no less than three films, for both television and the big screen and has graced the Broadway stage, this might be regarded as mere indulgence, but at the Tricycle it was a triumph.

The genesis of the play are the events that took place in Dayton, Tennessee, the Bible belt of the USA, in 1925 in what is known as the Scopes Monkey Trial. It was a court case which was set out to test the constitutionality of the passed laws in Southern States of the USA prohibiting the teaching of evolution in the classroom. Curiously, in the same year Frantz Kafka's 'The Trial' (Der Prozeß) was published posthumously in Europe.

The unravelling drama on stage is in Hillsboro, a small town which is the 'buckle on the Bible belt'. A place where a banner 'Read Your Bible' adorns even the Courtroom. The Bible is offered on sale as a 'guidebook to eternal life'.

A dramatic collision between the creationists, whose views are cast in fervent Godly stone against one lone voice, that of a teacher, Bertram Cates, performed by Steven Whyte (a solicitor), who dared challenge the law by expressing views which are akin to the evolutionists' ideas. He is 'an infidel, a sinner' and as such he is kept in custody in a cell under the Rea County Courthouse, lest he escapes justice. The town is gripped by excitement as the news that Mr. Brady is coming to town to prosecute the criminal Bertram Cates. When Rachel Brown, performed convincingly by Clarissa Amato (a solicitor), Bert's colleague, girlfriend and also the minister's daughter, secretly comes to visit him in jail, Meeker, the Court Usher and prison officer, impressively acted by Martin Mulgrew, (a barrister), introduces an element of sanity in a town gripped by hysteria. He allows the couple to meet in Court rather than down in the cells. The meeting between the two unravels the reasons for the arrest and the felony committed by Cates which led to his arrest. 'Why can't you just admit you were wrong? If the biggest man in the country - next to the President, maybe - if Matthew Harrison Brady comes here to tell the whole world how wrong you are -'

Rachel does not think Bert was wrong but believes it is best to conform while Bert tries to explain that all he did was to open Hunter's Civic Biology which led him to Darwin's Origin of Species.

The director Sally Knyvette utilises the limited space brilliantly and ensures that her team of amateur actors deliver entertaining and engaging performances. The strong religious fervour which ignites Hillsboro's inhabitants is parodied in gestures akin in part to mass hysteria. The character of Elijah, performed by Victor Wasserberg (a solicitor), humorously amplifies the Bible seller's zeal. He is cast in a manner reminiscent of today's fanatic religious leaders, a protruding beard, tunic and fabulously amusing gestures of religious ecstasy of a man who admits he can neither read nor write.

Against this background Bertram Cates' trial takes place. Two legal giants, Henry Drummond, for the defence, persuasively acted by Grahame Gordon, a senior solicitor, and the mighty Colonel Matthew Harrison Brady, for the prosecution, compellingly performed by Michael Burton, a High Court Judge at the Royal Courts of Justice, who stepped neatly into the role.

The judge, acted by Robert McCreath, a Senior Employment Solicitor, convincingly employs all the characteristics of a judge whose conduct and judgement are clouded by his veneration of prosecuting counsel and therefore fails to grasp Drummond's reasonable request to submit very relevant expert witnesses' testimony. He is a judge who uses his Court to announce that Reverend Brown has asked him to inform all present that 'there will be a prayer tonight on the Courthouse lawn, to pray for justice and guidance. All are invited'.

The costume design (Sydney Florence) added to the credibility of a discredited judicial process in the small town of Hillsboro. The legal team together with the Judge, jury and audience in the public arena ensured an enjoyable experience. It is unfortunate that only five performances were planned. The proceeds from tickets sales will go to the Tricycle's Education programme and Corinne Burton Memorial Trust.

An act that should be followed!

Reviewer: [Rivka Jacobson](#)