

To Kill a Mockingbird

Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Harper Lee
Dramatized by Christopher Sergel

Director: Susan H. Schulman
Designer: Charlotte Dean
Lighting Designer: Kevin Fraser
Sound Designer: Jim Neil

Avon Theatre
April 30 to October 27
Opens May 30, 2007

ABOUT THE PLAY

OVERVIEW

Based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the two-act play by Christopher Sergel places the narrator, Atticus Finch's young daughter, Scout, at the centre of the story. The play uses the adult Scout as the Narrator, a role that is sometimes doubled with the character of Miss Maudie. Although the novel was written in 1960, and appeared as a celebrated film in 1962, this stage play was not written until the late 1980s.

The play is frequently produced by high schools. It is estimated that over 260 amateur productions were done in the period of 2001-2003, with 80 per cent of them in schools. Although it has been banned, Mr. Sergel is said to have refused to censor the play because he wanted to protect "authenticity and fight censorship." Prior to 2003, in 15 years there had not been a request to censor it.

SYNOPSIS

In Maycomb, Alabama, in 1935, a black man stands accused of raping a white woman, and Atticus Finch is assigned to defend him. The black man, Tom Robinson, is innocent and his accusers' testimony is a lie, but even the wise Atticus can't prevent the jury from finding him guilty. The trial holds the attention of the entire town, bringing them, as one neighbour says, one step closer to tolerance – and showing Atticus's young children, Scout and Jem, that there's much to be proud of in their father, even if he can't throw a football. Later, a violent attack on Scout and Jem brings the reclusive Boo Radley to their rescue and reveals the neighbourhood bogeyman to be a kind and quiet man.

SOURCES AND ORIGINS

Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel on race relations provided the inspiration for the play. Written in 1960, the best-selling book was Lee's first and only novel. It was made into a film in 1962.

The character of Dill, the young friend of the Finch children, is rumoured to have been based on Harper Lee's childhood friend, Truman Capote. The father, Atticus Finch, is based on Lee's own father, also a lawyer.

Harper Lee herself studied law and would have drawn on her legal knowledge in writing the novel. The Alabama town in which she grew up is fictionalized in the novel. Her neighbourhood had a haunted house with a mysterious recluse similar to Boo Radley. However, Miss Lee once said that the book was not autobiographical.

The 1931 Scottsboro, Alabama, trial of nine young black men wrongly accused of the rape of two white women is said to have inspired the novel. At that time, Harper Lee was the same age as her heroine, Scout.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Harper Lee set her novel at a time of intensifying class and racial tensions in the United States. During the Great Depression, the failing economy hit the South very hard, and the black population, already poor, felt the effects more than anyone. Segregation was normal, as were hunger, unemployment and deprivation. Organizations such as the racist Ku Klux Klan had enormous influence on both local politics and the consequences of judicial procedures. Mob justice – including lynching – was frequent and vicious.

STAGE HISTORY

Christopher Sergel's highly successful play adaptation was first presented in England in 1987. It is a staple of American regional theatres with over 190 productions since 1999, and has been one of the most frequently produced plays in the U.S.A. The Theatre Communications Group reported it among the top 10 most produced plays by the group's members from 1994 to 1998, with over 40 different productions. It is also very popular in Canada and the U.K.

STRATFORD STAGE HISTORY

This is the first production of the play and the first play by Christopher Sergel (or Harper Lee) to be presented at the Stratford Festival.

IN OTHER TERMS

A film was made of Lee's novel in 1962 at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States. The film studio bought the rights to the novel for actor Gregory Peck, whose performance as Atticus Finch won him the Academy Award for Best Actor. The movie lost the Best Film Oscar to *Lawrence of Arabia*, the blockbuster hit of that year. Young actress Mary Badham, who played Scout, was nominated for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. Screenwriter Horton Foote won the Oscar for best adapted screenplay. The film also won best art direction/set direction for a black and white film.

Gregory Peck went to Alabama before filming began to meet the inspiration for Atticus Finch, Harper Lee's father. Miss Lee gave Mr. Peck her father's own watch in gratitude for his wonderful performance. So popular was his performance that a recent American Film Institute poll named Atticus Finch the "Number One Movie Hero."

The play covers some areas of the novel that the film didn't explore. Some characters – nosy Miss Crawford and cranky old Mrs. Dubose – that have only minor roles in the movie are more fully developed characters in the play.

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

PERIOD AND SETTING

The play is set in 1935 in the fictional Maycomb County of Alabama in the southern United States. Maycomb is said to be the fictional representation of writer Harper Lee's birthplace of Monroeville, Alabama. 1935 was the height of the Great Depression in the U.S.

Our production will be set in period.

SELECTED ARTISTIC PERSONNEL

Patricia Collins plays Miss Maudie in her 15th season at Stratford. Previously at Stratford, she has also appeared in *Gigi*, *Present Laughter*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Tartuffe*, *Medea*, *Richard II*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *Equus*, *The Stillborn Lover*, *Hamlet*, *Les Belles-Soeurs*, *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear* (U.S. tour, 1985), *Measure for Measure*, *Separate Tables*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Bosoms and Neglect*. Other credits include *The School for Scandal* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Summer* (CanStage); *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Vancouver Playhouse); *The Lion in Winter* (NAC); *A Little Night Music*

(Grand Theatre/CanStage); and *Wit* at GCTC in Ottawa. Film and television credits include *The Rez*, *The Adjuster*, *Speaking Parts*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Wojeck* and *Artichoke*. She has received Dora Awards for *The Europeans* (Necessary Angel) and *White Biting Dog* (Tarragon), and a Critics' Award for *Wit* (GCTC, Ottawa). This season, she also plays Edna in *A Delicate Balance*.

Atticus Finch is played by **Peter Donaldson**, now in his 23rd season at the Festival, where he most recently appeared as Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* and Pastor Manders in *Ghosts*. Over the years at Stratford, Mr. Donaldson has played Horace Vandergelder in *Hello, Dolly!*, the Narrator/Mysterious Man in *Into the Woods*, Timon in *Timon of Athens*, King Philip in *King John*, George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Claudius in *Hamlet*, Mr. Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera*, Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*, both Edgar and Kent in *King Lear*, Sir Percy Blakeney in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Jamie in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, among many others. His film and television work includes *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, for which he was awarded the Genie for best supporting actor. On television, Mr. Donaldson played Ian Bowles on the series *Emily of New Moon*. He can also be seen in CBC's *This Is Wonderland* and CTV's *The Eleventh Hour*. This season, Mr. Donaldson also plays the Earl of Kent in *King Lear*.

Tom Robinson is played by **Dion Johnstone**, in his fourth season at Stratford, where he has previously played Francisco in *The Tempest*, Orlando in *As You Like It*, Iachimo in *Cymbeline*, Lewis the Dauphin in *King John*, Lucilius in *Timon of Athens*, Orestes in *Electra* and *The Flies*, Chorus in *Agamemnon* and Mr. Stowe/Captain Hodges in *The Swanee: Princess Charlotte (The Acts of Venus)*. He has appeared at numerous theatres across Canada, performing many Shakespearean roles, and has extensive film and television credits including *Monk*, *Stargate SG-1*, *L.A. Law* and *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Mr. Johnstone recently played Boromir in the Toronto mega-musical *Lord of the Rings*. He is a graduate of the Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre Training. This season he also plays Edmund in *King Lear*.

In his sixth season at Stratford, **Laird Mackintosh** plays Boo Radley. In previous seasons he has played Lieutenant Joseph Cable in *South Pacific*, Cornelius Hackl in *Hello, Dolly!*, Rapunzel's Prince in *Into the Woods*, Lord Evelyn Oakleigh in *Anything Goes*, Manuel in *Gigi*, Reverend Kimball in *The Threepenny Opera* and Freddy Eynsford-Hill in *My Fair Lady*. Mr. Mackintosh played Raoul and understudied the Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera* in Toronto, and has appeared in many baroque theatre productions for Opera Atelier. He has appeared at theatres in both Canada and the U.S.A., as well as on television and film. He began his career as a dancer in the National Ballet of Canada. This season, he also plays Captain Billy Buck Chandler in *My One and Only*.

Dayna Tekatch plays Mayella Ewell in her sixth season at Stratford. In previous seasons she has played Charlotte in *Oliver!*, Ensign Dinah MacGregor in *South Pacific*, Cinderella in *Into the Woods* and Ermengarde in *Hello, Dolly!*, as well as appearing in

Guys and Dolls, Anything Goes, Gigi, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, My Fair Lady and Romeo and Juliet. At other theatres across Canada she has played the title role in *Little Red Riding Hood*, Maisie in *The Boy Friend* and Zaneeta in *The Music Man* and appeared in *Footloose's* Canadian première, among many other roles. At Stratford this year, she also plays Mickey in *My One and Only*.

PRODUCTION SPONSORSHIP

CIBC World Markets is a production co-sponsor. Production support is generously provided by Mrs. Jarka Hradecky.

RUNNING TIME

Estimated running time is 2:45 with one interval.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

HARPER LEE (1926–)

Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama, the youngest of four children. She attended Huntingdon College from 1944 to 1945, studied law at the University of Alabama from 1945 to 1949 (leaving six months short of her degree), and studied for one year at Oxford University. She travelled across America with her childhood friend Truman Capote, upon whom the character of Dill is based. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960. It is her only published book, but she has also published several articles and essays. Miss Lee continues to live in Alabama.

CHRISTOPHER SERGEL (1918-1993)

Christopher Sergel III was born in Iowa City. He graduated from the University of Chicago and served as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Merchant Marines during World War II. Mr. Sergel was a partner and later the vice-president of the Dramatic Publishing Company, which was founded by his great uncle, Charles Sergel, in 1885. He wrote more than a dozen plays and stage adaptations that were published by Dramatic Publishing Company. Prior to joining his family's publishing firm, Mr. Sergel spent two years as the captain of a schooner in the South Pacific and later lived for a year in the African bush while writing for *Sports Afield* magazine.

IN THE NOVELIST'S OWN WORDS

“People are people anywhere you put them.”

Interview, 1960

“Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.”

From *To Kill A Mockingbird*

RELATED EVENTS

TABLE TALK

Before the matinée performance of *To Kill a Mockingbird* on Wednesday, July 25, enjoy a buffet lunch and informal talk on the play by Ted McGee, professor of English at St. Jerome's University at the University of Waterloo. The event begins at 11:30 a.m. in the Festival Theatre's Paul D. Fleck Marquee. Cost (not including performance ticket): \$30. Cash bar.

THEATRE EXPLORER

To Kill A Mockingbird Workshop – Saturday, August 11, or Saturday, September 29, at 10:30 a.m. Festival actors will lead games and activities to explore the themes and plot of the play, followed by lunch before the matinée performance. Cost (not including performance ticket): \$45.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

HARPER LEE ON FILM

The 2004 film *Capote* features Harper Lee as a character played by actor Catherine Keener, who was nominated for an Academy Award for best supporting actress. A 2006 film, *Infamous*, starring Toby Jones as Capote, features actor Sandra Bullock as Harper Lee.

MOCKINGBIRD THE MUSICAL?

It is said that in 1970, someone tried to adapt the novel as a musical starring Don Murray. However the rights could not be obtained, and it was never made.

MOCKINGBIRD THE MOVIE

The screenplay for the acclaimed film was written by Horton Foote. “Out of the blue,” he later said, Foote got a call asking if he wanted to write the screenplay for a newly released novel by another Southern writer, Harper Lee.

“I’d never met her, but I knew the director, Robert Mulligan. He called and said Harper didn’t want to do the adaptation and would I be interested?” Foote recalled “I was working on something of my own and was a little reluctant to dramatize somebody else’s book. I was going to say no.”

But Foote’s wife, Lillian, had read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and told her husband he had better take a look at the book before turning down the job.

“She’d always given me good advice, so I read it and of course called the director right back and said I’d do it,” said Foote.

(source: www.albany.edu/writers-inst/tu_foote_horton.html)

INSPIRATION

Atticus Finch shares his last name with novelist Harper Lee’s mother. Her father was a lawyer – who, it is said, informed the character of Atticus – and she herself had studied law so was acquainted with legal procedures and language. Miss Lee based the character of young Dill on her childhood friend, Truman Capote.

THE TEACHERS’ FAVOURITE

To Kill a Mockingbird, the novel, was published to mostly favourable reviews in July 1960. It was featured by the Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Guild and Reader’s Digest Condensed Books, and was soon near the top of the best-seller lists for hardcover fiction. A National Council of Teachers of English survey in 1963 found that the book was being taught in 7 per cent of American schools. By 1988, when the survey was repeated, the figure was 74 per cent. Only *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Huckleberry Finn* were being assigned more often.

(source: www.newhousenews.com)

OPRAH'S PICK

To Kill A Mockingbird is Oprah Winfrey's "favourite book of all time." She calls it a "masterpiece."

GET SMART AND SUPERMAN and more

In the comics, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Superman's favourite book. On TV Maxwell Smart of the '60s TV show *Get Smart* hunts down a Mexican artifact, the "Tequila Mockingbird." A British band is named the Boo Radleys and an American band calls itself Atticus.

ON THE INTERNET

FOR MANY LINKS

www.aresearchguide.com/mock.html

GENERAL INFORMATION

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Kill_a_Mockingbird