

'All My Sons' unfolds in heartbreaking style

1/30/11

By Diana Nollen

The Gazette

IOWA CITY — Riverside Theatre is celebrating its 30th anniversary in the best gut-wrenching style.

"All My Sons," which opened to a full house Friday night, is the perfect example of the magic created when perfect prose is rendered by a perfect cast and production team.

THEATER REVIEW

Arthur Miller's haunting drama of a family disintegrating in the wake of deception and denial left its audience speechless. We should have cheered and stood at the end to show our appreciation, but we couldn't. We were too stunned by what had unfolded for 2 1/2 hours in the intimate theater on North Gilbert Street.

This is high drama in the tragic Greek style, but tempered by truly funny and poignant scenes that diffused the angst, especially in Act I. The main release in Act II came at the end, when audible gasps and deep exhalations punctuated the darkness.

The action takes place in the Keller family's backyard on the outskirts of a Midwestern town in August 1947. Patriarch Joe Keller has been exonerated and released from prison after being accused of selling defective airplane parts during World War II, leading to the deaths of 21 U.S. fighter pilots. His business partner and neighbor, Steve Deever, remains in prison, taking the fall for the deed.

Keller's eldest son, a pilot, is missing in action and presumed dead by everyone but his mother, Kate Keller, whose tenuous hold on reality is tied to her unrealistic hope.

Riverside founders Ron Clark and Jody Hovland, married in real life, bring such natural dimensions to their roles of Joe and Kate Keller, a couple in crisis, drowning in secrets and fierce loyalties to the life they have built. Both embody their characters with utter aplomb,

Fast take

- **What:** Arthur Miller's "All My Sons"
- **Where:** Riverside Theatre, 213 N. Gilbert St., Iowa City
- **When:** Through Feb. 20; 7:30 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays
- **Tickets:** \$12 to \$26 through the Riverside Theatre Box Office, (319) 338-7672, or www.riversidetheatre.org/buytickets; \$12 student rush 20 minutes before performances; Talkback with cast and director today
- **Information:** www.riversidetheatre.org

finding their tensions and humanity in a heartbreaking dance expertly choreographed by director Mark Hunter.

Joe is the epitome of the American dream, fending for himself since age 10, building a successful manufacturing plant out of backbreaking labor and unyielding desire. He loves his family above all else and his greatest desire is to turn over his business to his remaining son, Chris, played with aching compassion by Scot West. Kate, seemingly fragile as a bird with a broken wing, proves to have a cruel tongue and an inner fierceness revealed in a shattering scene.

The catalyst for the final demise comes with the return of Chris to the family fold and his intention to marry his late brother's fiancée, Ann Deever, daughter of Joe's former partner. West and Cristina Panfilio exude a lovely, palpable awkwardness when broaching the possibility of marriage, then later bring their own fire to the final, explosive confrontations.

The supporting cast adds distinctive, new elements to the unfolding pathos.

The design team's period costuming, moody lightscape and fragmented scenery perfectly evoke the fragmented world disintegrating on stage.

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