

Mockingbird, Revived

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor

Tuesday, 10 May 2011 10:37 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 May 2011 10:34



The Beaufort Theater Company takes on an American classic that's every bit as relevant today – and maybe just as shocking – as it was 50 years ago.

To Kill a Mockingbird has been on my mind for a while now. Last year – as the novel celebrated its 50th anniversary – I reread it for my book club, attended a birthday party for it at our local library, and wrote about it in my column.

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From [Rants & Raves, June 2010](#) : *"I can't imagine Harper Lee wrote *To Kill A Mockingbird* in hopes that her readers would come away feeling "comfortable." I don't think any serious author writes for that reason. What I found, upon revisiting TKAM as an adult, was a beautiful, funny, poignant story... that made me deeply uncomfortable. And I needed it. I needed to feel – really feel – how things were at that time, in that place, for those people. I needed to wrestle with their contradictions, recognize their flaws and their gifts, watch as some of them evolved while others stagnated. I needed to see my own resemblance to these characters – even some of the "bad" ones – and acknowledge our kinship. I needed to feel uncomfortable."*

And so it was with great delight that I found myself feeling uncomfortable, once again, as I sat watching the Beaufort Theater Company rehearse its upcoming production of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, opening May 19th. Once again, I was in sultry Maycomb, AL, circa 1935. The Old South accents were thick – along with the Old South attitudes toward race and class – and the N Word was being bandied about cavalierly.



"It sounds cavalier, doesn't it," director Ian Sprague laughs, during an interview later that night. "It's actually been pretty tense."

There are several African Americans in the cast of TKAM, and a few children, and I'm guessing "tense" is an understatement. I wonder, aloud, if Ian's worried about the audience's reaction to hearing this word that's been so long banished from polite society.

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“Honestly? I’m looking forward to it,” he says. “Not because I want to shock people, but because I’m curious to see how they’re affected by the word. We hear it so frequently in the context of violence – on TV, at the movies, in rap music. But do we still recognize the severity of the word? What about when we hear it from the mouths of children, speaking casually, with no conscious malice?”



Having recently written a column about the foolishness of the new, expurgated edition of *Huckleberry Finn*

– the one that’s been cleansed of the N Word – I confess to Ian that hearing the word flung about in rehearsal has been surprisingly jarring to me... that the impact was more shocking than I’d expected. It occurs to us both that this speaks to the enduring relevance of *TKAM*, a story about the 1930s published in 1960. (The novel was later adapted into a play by Christopher Sergel.)

“I think it’s even more relevant now than it was when it first came out,” Ian says. “Fifty years ago, this stuff was on the forefront of everybody’s minds... civil rights, race relations. We were all thinking about it and talking about it. Now we’ve reached this place where we all assume that we have equality and that everything is okay; and the truth is, it’s not. We still have a long way to go. ‘Mockingbird’ highlights the way things were for black people not that long ago, the struggles that they had to endure on even the tiniest levels of everyday life.... struggles that people today – especially kids – don’t realize. Scout has this great line that really drives that home: (housekeeper) Calpurnia has gone to bang

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