

# Gender-Bending In The Jury Room

A Review by  
Alan Raeburn

**T**WELVE ANGRY PEOPLE by Sherman L. Sergel is based on an the 1954 teleplay called *Twelve Angry Men*, written by Reginald Rose, later seen on Broadway. It was a time when only men sat on juries. Times have changed, and theatre producers have sought to bring other dimensions to this jury room drama by casting both genders with the director selecting the best actor for each role. This provides plenty of casting flexibility and, in fact, can colour the significance of the behavior each character exhibits.

Medley Entertainment, one of a slew of new stage production companies which continue to proliferate the Toronto theatre landscape, has allowed resident director **Alexander Galant** to come up with a cast which, after a few performances under its collective belt before reviewing, gave a highly credible rendition under physically confining conditions in a 45-seat venue.

Galant has brought some terms and references up to date. (For example, the Broadway show one of the jurors wants to catch is "Les Miz.") Staged with the audience seated on two sides of the small playing area, Galant seems to have gone beyond script guides, allowing the 12 jurors to move away from their chairs around the oblong table. We, the audience, are unacknowledged visitors to this jury room. No scenic device gives evidence of the room's decor or design, just the theatre's plain black walls. So the onus rests even more heavily on the players to hold our attention. And hold it they did. This is also a salute to the script's well-written dialogue which the four men and eight women deliver with natural conviction.

It is the guilt or innocence of a teenage boy accused in the murder of his father which these jurors must decide. They have voted 11 to 1 for a guilty verdict. But Juror #8 is portrayed with much understated compassion by **Neville Edwards**, a black actor, which lends the



Valerie Reinis

role understated dimensions not necessarily inherent with a Caucasian actor. He isn't convinced the evidence is cut and dry and sets out to prove the strong possibility of innocence. By the play's end, he has brought even the most ardent guilty voters to a change of heart through diligent, thoughtful analysis of the circumstantial evidence.

The evidence is scrutinized, analyzed and sanitized by the 12 jurors bringing their human biases, prejudices, and their intellectual and social limitations. Frustrations are vented, temperaments explode as the Foreperson exercises her (in this case) authority as moderator. **Adela Rodriguez's** credibility is high in this role. She not only possesses strong acting talent, but brings her real life legal background to the part. **Kris Saric** as the pugnacious and stubborn Juror #3 is another stand-out. His natural energy and physical assets result in a completely convincing portrayal, producing some of the most tense moments of the evening. **Ken Pack's** quieter Juror #11 contributes natural elements to his Asian ethnic character -- which may or may not be as written. **Paul Robbins** lends energetic credibility to his cut and dry advertising-minded Juror #12. **Susanne Bell** has the other heavy role as the ignorant Southern Juror #10, desperate to end the exhausting deliberations with her limited vision. Her strong performance also helped confirm our belief that we were present in a jury room.

The balance of this flawless cast in less dramatic roles, but rendered with equal credibility included **Rebecca Walsh, Valerie Reinis, Wendy Cage, Ruth Joyner Lisa Norton and Michelle Anthony** and **Carmen Gillespie**.

*Village Playhouse on Bloor at Runnymede, Toronto, February 4-15*

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