

Audiences Get Unique 'View' in McLean High Play



By Leslie Poster

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McLean High School students Damian Leverett (left) and Siena Richardson star as Eddie and Beatrice Carbone, a couple whose relationship is tested in Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge." (Photo: News-Press)

When McLean Theatre Company folk open Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge" Wednesday, they won't just allow the audience to experience the struggles of the play's protagonist, they will literally invite them into his home.

According to Terry Mittelman, the play's stage manager and a student at McLean High School, the audience will be filed into the school's Black Box Theater from behind the stage and asked to make their way through the set to take their seats for each of the play's performances.

"We want the audience to feel like they were in the tenement with the family," Mittelman said.

From rows of mismatched wooden chairs set on risers, audiences will look down upon the 1950s Red Hook, Brooklyn living room and kitchen of Eddie Carbone, where the Italian American longshoreman lives with his wife, Beatrice, and their orphaned niece, Catherine.

They'll watch as the family takes in Beatrice's cousins, who have illegally immigrated from Italy for the chances at prosperity in America, and see how the arrangement brings out a troubling element to Eddie's protective relationship with Catherine.

"I didn't know any other way to make it feel as small as it needed to feel, and intimate," Amy Poe, the play's director and a theater teacher at McLean High, said of staging the production in the Black Box Theater, adding that the tight quarters of the theater will reflect the small tenement apartment in which the story unfolds.

The Black Box Theater, a smaller venue than the school's main stage, can only accommodate 75 people a night. The group will be staging nine shows to make up for the smaller audience capacity.

The play was selected as part of the theater group's study of naturalism and realism.

"The kids and I both, we really love Arthur Miller's work," Poe said. But selecting this particular work, written in the 1950s by the famed American playwright, meant having the high school actors understand and portray some mature themes. Poe said she led the students in their study of the characters to help them understand the nuances of the complex characters and situations that Miller portrays.

"They've been absolutely wonderful with their treatment of the subject," Poe said, "very mature, and honest, and understanding, and empathetic, and that's kind of what I wanted them to learn."

Damian Leverett, who leads a cast of 11 fellow student actors as Eddie Carbone, said developing a character like Carbone was difficult for a high school student, and that he set about filling in the story of Carbone's life to fully understand and portray him.



ne of my dream roles, honestly, and it's one of my favorite plays," Leverett said.

He considers Eddie Carbone both a hero and villain in the story, a man who is brought down by "irreversible faults."

"Tragedy can happen in everyday life, and recognizing that is what will really allow you to get into this play," Poe said, reflecting on Arthur Miller's theories of tragedy and the common man. "I want audiences to leave really feeling the tragic nature and how quickly things can turn on a dime in everyday life."

"A View from the Bridge" will be staged at 7 p.m. March 21-24 and 27-29. A matinee is scheduled for 2 p.m. March 25. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. All performances will take place at McLean High School's Black Box Theater, 1633 Davidson Road, McLean. For more information, visit mcleanhstheatre.org.

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