

# TWELVE ANGRY MEN 1998

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## RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

### In the name of justice

**A** NEW venue for Teddington Theatre Club, the small Barn Theatre, West Molesey, proved an ideal location for Christopher Ivey's taut production of *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose.

First written for American television in 1954 under the shadow of Joe McCarthy's communist witch-hunt, and later made into a memorable film, it's both a play of protest and well-considered argument for civil liberties.

In the Criminal Courts building, New York, summer of 1954, twelve

white New Yorkers, jurors on a murder case, are ordinary men facing up in varying degrees, to the onerous duty of serving justice.

As the one juror questioning the evidence, Stephen Bentley gave an unheroic, compelling performance as the quiet sceptic, determined to make the others examine their reasons for finding a guilty verdict. Painstakingly he analyses the testimonies, finds the flaws, breaks down their preconceptions and ignorant prejudices so that they, if not convinced of the accused boy's innocence, are in reasonable

doubt of his guilt.

There were good characterisations as the hardliners from Barry Hill as a ranting racist and Pete Slater painted a revealing portrait of a man so beset by his own private devils as to be incapable of detached judgement.

Tension was well sustained throughout. Although these three had the lion's share of the action, the others, although vignettes, in a fine example of company acting with not a single weak link, came across as very real rounded people with lives beyond the courtroom.

Jenny Scott

## Top verdict judging the

### Teddington Theatre Club's *Twelve Angry Men* at Barn Theatre Club on March 16

**S**OME might think that for an amateur dramatic group to put on a play that has been made into a classic film is to court disaster.

But Christopher Ivey's production of 'Twelve Angry Men' proved that with imagination, dedication and a cast in tune with the director's ideas, all memories of the cinema fade into insignificance.

TTC is fortunate that it can call on a pool of actors of proven stature, as well as the up-and-coming young men from Eric Yardley's Youth Action Theatre.

While there were varying degrees of expertise on view, there was no



weak link in a cast that held the attention of a capacity audience in an iron grip.

Stephen Bentley added to his laurels as Juror No 8 whose doubts about the guilt of the 16-year-old on trial for parricide eventually swing the other 11 if not to his view, then at least to an admission, that there is sufficient doubt to justify their returning a 'not guilty' verdict.

This was a perfor-

mance of great weight, helped immeasurably by Bentley's gift of stillness - here was real acting.

I was very impressed by the final moments as Bentley confronted his most implacable adversary, played by Peter Slater on splendid form, whom he has just humiliated by forcing him to confront his own prejudices.

There was no reconciliation as Bentley handed Slater his jacket, but a

look of pure hatred from the latter.

The only thing I missed was the nunce that leaves one wondering whether he has done the right thing; difficult to bring off, but a moment of great dramatic force.

There were some fine performances from the stalwarts: Allen Dickens a cool, calculating stockbroker, Edward Jeffroy quietly forceful as the immigrant watchmaker, Jack Smerdon deeply moving as an elderly man able to put aside his disappointment with life to give the boy his chance, Barry Hill's odious racist, and Mike Waters's jury foreman were beautifully understated.

Here was TTC at its very finest, a few slow pick ups of clues notwithstanding, and I count it a privilege to have seen the play.

GEORGE ALLAN