

Review: “Judgment Day” at Summerscape

Through July 25 at the Fisher Center at Bard College



Photo by Cory Weaver.

To begin by praising the set, props and sound design of the 1937 drama [*Judgment Day*](#) at Bard Summerscape should not be misinterpreted: This is an extraordinary evening of theatre in every respect, but the awesome stagecraft powerfully serves the story of a rules-following stationmaster whose split-second mistake causes a disastrous train crash that kills 18 people and a small town’s subsequent attempt to determine guilt and find justice. The Fisher Center’s black box Theatre Two has been transformed into a tunnel-shaped amphitheater and the seats on both sides are high above the stage. Mimi Lien’s set moves slowly back and forth on tracks in several scenes, reinforcing the play’s theme that reality shifts based on one’s perspective—and one’s motives. When the first train comes rumbling by, you can feel the theater vibrate and get a visceral sense for the violent power of a coal-stoked locomotive barreling through town at full speed.

Though it’s set in Austria-Hungary in the late 1930s, Ödön von Horváth’s play (translated by Christopher Hampton) is a universal tale about small-town life, the rush to judgment, and the question of whether lying to protect another person is ever defensible or wise. The star of the angry mob is Kelly McAndrew’s Frau Leimgruber, the archetypal town gossip who’s unaware of the consequences of her selfish disregard. As the stationmaster, Herr Hudetz, the handsome Kevin O’Donnell is charming, frightening and utterly convincing. Frau Hudetz, his older, embittered and unstable wife, is played with intense passion by Stephanie Roth Haberle. Hayley Treider as the not-so-innocent Anna is pretty perfect in her pivotal role. The other performances are mostly strong, but it’s a bit unsettling that some actors use accents and others don’t. Nevertheless, director Caitriona McLaughlin has managed to make this small story have an epic feel, and she has the actors use every inch of the bowling alley set to great effect. It seems a shame that this play will only run for ten performances, because anybody who appreciates theater that is visually and intellectually stimulating and morally challenging should see this production of *Judgment Day*.

[Judgment Day at Bard Summerscape](#)

Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

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