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University Park, IL,
April
08,
2022

GSU theatre closes season with '12 Angry Jurors'



[Governors State University's](#) (GSU) [Theatre and Performance Studies'](#) (TAPS') closed its season with a production of "12 Angry Jurors," which ran from April 7–9 on the [Center for Performing Arts'](#) stage.

Based on the 1950s film "12 Angry Men," which featured a powerhouse of Hollywood giants (all white), GSU's cast included women and individuals of color. Beyond reflecting inclusivity, the casting raised important questions, such as what it means to have a Black woman as foreperson in charge of the jurors or what it means to see Black men in the roles of protagonist and antagonist?

Director Dr. Patrick Santoro, who also serves as Associate Professor and Artistic Director of GSU's TAPS program says, "Although the film was written in the late 1950s, the play unfortunately has not lost its relevance."

"Our rendition, like the original, is intended to serve as a critique of the American justice system," Santoro says. "The last two years, in particular, have cemented a hard, cold

truth: Bodies are political, and not all bodies are created equal. Injustice and inequality are endemic in both our legal system and its rehabilitation efforts.”

While the production is grounded in realism, it is also stylized, merging past with present, Santoro adds.

“While our production features a 1950s-specific set, the actors wear modern-day costumes,” Santoro notes. “The intention is to raise questions: “Over the past 65 years, what has changed? What has stayed the same? Are things better or worse? In what ways? And for whom?”

The plot of ‘12 Angry Jurors’ covers the trial of a 19-year-old man accused of fatally stabbing his father. It looks like an open-and-shut case—until Juror 8 begins opening the other jurors’ eyes to the facts. Throughout deliberations, each juror reveals his or her own background, biases, and prejudices. Tensions build as testimonies are re-examined and the murder is re-enacted.

‘12 Angry Jurors’ featured a cast of 13, 11 of whom are GSU community members: nine students, one faculty and one staff. GSU English Professor Kerri K. Morris, who portrays Juror 4, shares, “I’ve had fun seeing the talent of all the cast, but I’m especially proud of the students (two of whom have been in my classes). I have so much to learn from them.”

GSU freshman Xavier Thompson (Juror 5) praised the rehearsal process and direction. “The ensemble exercises have instilled in me and my fellow actors a sense of comradery and togetherness,” Thompson says.

“The production is a group effort and requires a lot of team-building and trust between cast members,” adds GSU graduate student Manuel Reza. “One of the greatest challenges of the production is portraying our characters in an honest, very human, way. It would be easy to present most of these characters as caricatures, but the nuance would be lost. Our job as actors is to create something both real and entertaining.”

The Cast of *12 Angry Jurors*

- Kimelia R. Carter as Foreperson
- Manual Reza as Juror 2
- Marquis Parks as Juror 3
- Kerri K. Morris as Juror 4
- Xavier Thompson as Juror 5
- Eboni MaJoney Williams as Juror 6
- Jazmin Butler as Juror 7
- Darius Jackson as Juror 8

- Lynne Clayton as Juror 9
- David Niemeyer as Juror 10
- Ellen Dillon as Juror 11
- Dakota Keel as Juror 12
- Ethan Moore-Walker as Guard