



New Hope Free Press

2
ADVERTISE
the Free Press
CLICK for More Info

HEADLINES

- [Six area artists 'Raising a Little Cane' just north of Lambertville](#)



- [Front Page](#)
- [Around Town](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Dining Out](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

- [Home](#) [Subscribe](#)



COCKTAILS
at the
CASTLE

MERCER MUSEUM & FONTHILL CASTLE
Smithsonian Affiliate

Friday, October 12, 2018
Buy tickets now



Addison Wolfe
Real Estate

A BOUTIQUE REAL ESTATE FIRM WITH GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Published On: Wed, Oct 17th, 2018

[Entertainment](#) | By [Charlie Sahner](#)

Town and Country's timely 'The Children's Hour' is gripping drama

Share This



Subscribe To
RSS FEED

Tags

[The Children's Hourtown and country players](#)



By John Dwyer

Do we uproot good work and good people on the basis of unfounded allegations? Are we prone to believe the salacious, and grant it more attention than “good” news? Are claims by the rich and powerful given more credence than more valid assertions by those of less means?

“The Children’s Hour” is a thought-provoking analysis of all that. Premiering in New York in 1934, it was up for a Pulitzer Prize. Many felt it would have gotten it, but for the controversial plot.

“The Children’s Hour” concerns two college friends, Karen Wright and Martha Dobie, who open a girl’s boarding school, and how trouble ensues when a wealthy family’s little girl, Mary Tilford, decides to do whatever it takes to get her way. Mary is uncontrollable. Her wealth and privilege and predilection to plot schemes to solidify power over her peers and, eventually, over her teachers, destroys civility and the equilibrium of the school and then the community in which she lives.

During the first act, we discover that Karen is the fiancée of a local doctor, Joe Cardin. Along with Karen and Martha, some of the classes at the school are taught by Lily Mortar, Martha’s aunt. Without going into too much detail, after Mary is disciplined by Karen and Martha, she appeals to her grandmother, Amelia Tilford, to take her out of school. When the grandmother, who has helped the school teachers set up their school, refuses, Mary comes up with a lie that will change her grandmother’s mind. She tells her that the women are having a lesbian affair. This “fake news” sets off a sequence of events that ruins lives and makes everyone question one another’s thoughts, views and integrity.



Like “Hunchback of Notre Dame,” the show that preceded this one, Town and Country Players has done us the favor of picking a timely show. “The Children’s Hour” makes us think about our values and how easily lives can be affected by lies. Do we listen to our better angels and give others a chance to explain their actions? Or are we more prone to be judgmental and feel false superiority over others? In a Trumpian world, where hyperbole is constant and lying is “let the buyer beware,” the play asks why we are prone to believe gossip. Is it due to our having a prurient interest in viciousness? A mean-spirited desire to bring others down and confirm our own prejudices?

This production again proves what many of us blessed to live in the area already know. Due to our close proximity to New York and Philadelphia, two cities known for the best theater anywhere, the byproduct of that proximity is a deep bench of theatrical talent that shows up in our community theater. When you have the opportunity to live in the midst of the theatrical history that is Bucks County, you are surprised only slightly by excellent performances that would be at home on any Equity stage in New York.

Danielle Foley gives a nuanced, heartbreaking performance as Martha Dobie. The honesty of the performance, with its many conflicted levels of loyalty and shame and devotion and confusion, is manifest in every beat, every second of her performance. Her struggle and pain drove home the point of what needless but purposed maliciousness can cause.

Equally strong was Caitlin Riley as Karen Wright. Her Karen is more focused and mindful, though also at the point of breaking. Like a reed in the wind, Karen is one that you hope may bow, but not break. But that question is also up for grabs as the harshness of her conservative patrons comes down on her and the school.

Sandra Hartman as Amelia Tilford, Ken Stephon as Dr. Joseph Cardin and Sally Donovan as Mrs. Lily Mortar give outstanding performances in this involved, meaningful production.

In a world where you hope that truth is the norm, we tell ourselves we value honesty. The compelling performance of Makayla McClintic as Mary Tilford compels you to wonder if Mary did not grow up to be the norm. If you go to your mailbox today and see the political postcards that put out false or misleading narratives, you wonder if the world has not gone the way of Mary Tilford. McClintic gives Mary just the right mixture of deviousness and charm to make her appealingly bad.



This tale was one that was based on a true story when Lillian Hellman first wrote it back in the thirties. It was filmed in a watered-down version where the love triangle was heterosexual in “These Three” with Miriam Hopkins, Merle Oberon and Joel McCrea. Due to the Hayes Office, the film could not have a lesbian character in it. When producer Sam Goldwyn was told he could not have a lesbian in a

movie, he replied "So what? We'll make her an American." Lillian Hellman was hired to adapt her play to make it acceptable to the morality of the Hayes Office and the acceptance of middle America. Again, the love that dare not speak its name.

When I first saw "The Children's Hour" in the updated film from 1961 with Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine and James Garner, the lesbian theme drew me in as a gay man. LGBT people, who had no film presence at all, no representation of their lives, yearned for seeing something depicted of who they were, no matter the story or outcome. It spoke to me, as it did to many in the community.

Though the central theme regards the harm of lies by the rich and powerful, it does remain an important piece of literature for gays and lesbians. If not planned, it is certainly ironic and, again, timely that it opened at Town and Country Players, the day after National Coming Out Day on Oct. 11.

An additional issue that's addressed in the show is bullying. "Children's Hour" will feature two talk backs on the topic after both Sunday matinees. I applaud Town and Country for conducting talk backs on this important concern.

Kudos to director Rob Rosiello who has given us a fine production of an important, thought-provoking play with a great cast. I urge you to see "The Children's Hour." There couldn't be a better time to see it for its up-to-the-minute take on power and the use of lies.

The play runs through Oct. 27, and tickets can be [purchased online](#). Town and Country Players is located at 4158 Old York Road in Buckingham.

About the Author



Charlie Sahrer - "Once you can accept the universe as matter expanding into nothing that is something, wearing stripes with plaid comes easy." - Einstein

Related News



Tweet

Share

2

[Jackie 'The Joke Man' Martling takes the stage at RRazz Room New Hope Oct. 13](#)



['Rocky Horror Show' returns to Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope Oct. 12](#)



[Amazing acting makes 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' a hit for Town and Country Players](#)