

Go See EastLine Theatre's Provocative Production of 'An Enemy of the People'

By Cindi Sansone-Braff

EastLine Theatre's latest production, "An Enemy of the People," proves the prophetic words of the esteemed

Nineteenth-Century Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen still have a powerful impact on Twenty-First-Century audiences.

Ibsen's lyrical, symbolic, and poetic canon of plays, which include classics such as "Peer Gynt," "Ghosts," "A Doll's House," "Hedda Gabler," and "When We Dead Awaken," are the most frequently performed plays in the world, second only to Shakespeare. The sad news is that you're unlikely to see a production of any of his plays on Long Island. Thanks to the creative endeavors of EastLine Theatre, from now until February 23, 2025, you can catch one of Ibsen's timeless masterpieces.

My college playwrighting textbook, Block and Shedd's "Masters of Modern Drama," opens with Henrik Ibsen's plays and the lines "Modern drama begins with Ibsen." The pioneer of theatrical realism, Ibsen was also the father of dramedy, plays that combine drama with elements of comedy.

Despite its serious subject matter, Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" is infused with humor. The plot revolves around a small-town doctor-turned-whistleblower who discovers contaminated water in their local spa's mineral baths. Ibsen based this plot on several real-life events, including a doctor who notified the guests at a health spa about a cholera outbreak, causing them to leave the premises. Outraged by the loss of revenue, the community reacted by throwing

stones at the doctor's house. This 1882 play is overflowing with thought-provoking themes that still pack a hefty punch; for instance, people placing self-interest above what is morally and ethically correct for others, the responsibility of individuals to speak up against injustice, and how easy it is for democracy to descend into mobocracy.

"An Enemy of the People" has been adapted countless times by playwrights, including Arthur Miller's 1950 three-act version. Miller adapted this political satire as a way to confront the dangers of McCarthyism with its censorship aimed at silencing political dissenters. Amy Herzog's recent two-act adaptation had a 2024



Photo courtesy of EastLine Theatre



Broadway run featuring a blockbuster cast, including Jeremy Strong, Michael Imperioli, Katie Broad, Caleb Eberhardt, Matthew August Jeffers, David Patrick Kelly, Victoria Pedretti, Thomas Jay Ryan, and Alan Trong. Herzog also picked up the 2024 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Adaptation.

Originally written as a five-act play, director and adaptor Paul DeFilippo streamlined EastLine Theatre's production into a one-act, full-length play that retains the Nineteenth-century drama's comedic mood while amplifying the life-and-death stakes at hand. Adapting a play written by one of the most revered dramatists in history, DeFilippo had big shoes to fill. Still, his Twenty-First-Century adaptation stayed true to Ibsen's intent of having a hopeful ending, whereas Arthur Miller's Twentieth-Century brooding adaptation closed on a darker note with the line "...and the strong must learn to be lonely."

It was a stroke of genius by DeFilippo, who also directed his adaptation, to place center stage two small, inground pools of water. These strategically placed bodies of water forced the actors to maneuver around precariously, serving as an apt metaphor for how many of the play's characters ignore the life-threatening elephant in the room, the contaminated mineral baths.

The tight-knit ensemble brought their A-game to this stellar production. John Torres gave a riveting performance as the protagonist, Dr. Thomas Stockmann. Torres, a charismatic actor, delivered his many humorous lines with expert timing. Steven Garry gave a nuanced performance as Peter Stockmann, Thomas's older brother and the play's duplicitous antagonist. Peter, a

stuffed shirt plagued by indigestion, is also the town's calculating mayor and the baths committee's chairman.

Elizabeth Rowe delivered a tour de force performance as Katherine Stockmann, Thomas's loving, loyal, and trustworthy wife. Victoria Kay commanded the stage as the Stockmann's headstrong and idealistic daughter, Petra, a disenchanting teacher. Petra also dates Hovstad, the editor of the local newspaper. Mauricio Gonzalez's demonstrative body language and facial expressions brought depth to the character of Hovstad, a young man who claims to be a freethinker while caving into mob mentality. Tom Ciorciari gave an award-worthy performance as Aslaksen, the mild-mannered, non-confrontational, everything-in-moderation fanatic who happens to be the newspaper's printer, the homeowner's association chairman, and a Temperance Society member.

One of the show's highlights was Matthew Rubenfeld's spot-on portrayal of Captain Horster, a kind man who spends most of his time at sea and who knows little about life on the land; however, he proves to be a stalwart supporter of the Stockmann family.

EastLine Theatre presents this newly adapted classic in partnership with the Babylon Citizens Council on the Arts. Wendy Grimm and Lynn Adler designed the authentic period costumes, the outstanding lighting design was by Nicole Savin, and Paul DeFilippo composed the original music.

Ibsen's plays have the uncanny ability to tap into the political pulse of the world, and DeFilippo's astute adaptation reinforced Ibsen's relevancy for today. "An Enemy of the People" is performed at the BACCA Arts Center, 149 North Wellwood Avenue in Lindenhurst and runs through February 23, 2025. Tickets are \$25, and you can purchase them at EastLine.ludus.com. More information is available at EastLinetheatre.org or by calling 516-749-5047.

Cindi Sansone-Braff is an award-winning playwright. She has a BFA in Theatre from UCONN and is a member of the Dramatists Guild. She is the author of "Grant Me a Higher Love," "Why Good People Can't Leave Bad Relationships," and "Confessions of a Reluctant Long Island Psychic." Her full-length Music Drama, "Beethoven, The Man, The Myth, The Music," is published by Next Stage Press. www.Grantmeahigherlove.com.

