

'To Kill a Mockingbird' to be staged Monday in Holyoke



The National Players from Olney, Maryland, will present "To Kill a Mockingbird," a play inspired by Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, on Monday, May 4, at 6:30 p.m. at Holyoke High School.

IF YOU GO

Event: "To Kill a Mockingbird"

When: Monday, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Holyoke High School's Sears Auditorium

Cost: \$10; \$5 for senior citizens, students and children

For more info: Online at mifafestival.org

By Cori Urban | Special to The Republican, April 28, 2015 at 9:47 AM, updated April 28, 2015

The play "To Kill a Mockingbird" is "entertaining, not just relevant."

That is the assessment of Donald T. Sanders, executive artistic director of Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts Victory Theatre, an organization that is helping to bring the production to Holyoke High School.

Based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the play takes place in a sleepy, Southern town and confronts issues of race and justice.

The National Players, America's longest-running touring company, will present the show, Monday, 6:30 p.m. at Holyoke High School's Sears Auditorium.

Since the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a policeman on Aug. 9, in Ferguson, Mo., there has been increased media coverage of tension between African Americans and white police officers. The organization, Black Lives Matter, has grown, and addresses what its website calls "the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity."

Sanders said "To Kill A Mockingbird's" focus on racial justice and racial communication and understanding makes it "still one of the great works."

A desire to stage the show emerged before the unrest in Ferguson. "There is always a general atmosphere of misunderstanding," Sanders explained. "Those events made it even more poignant."

The play, he added, is evidence that "people have been working (to achieve) this kind of harmony for a long time." The presentation is part of a Holyoke High School Drama Club service project that aims to enrich Holyoke High School's curriculum and support in-school theater arts, to support the educational arts non-profit National Players, to provide a meaningful theater experience at reasonable cost to residents of Holyoke and to raise funds for to stage a performance next year.

Donations are being accepted through GoFundMe at www.gofundme.com/ojjeaw.

"To have any live performance that is really, really well done like National Players is doing is always a treat," Sanders said.

He noted that Holyoke once had seven live theaters, including a 3,000-seat opera house built in 1874. "Holyoke is a theater town," he said. "It's very exciting for everybody – students and the general public – to see live theater." Audience members can expect actors that are "great communicators" and thus "a connection between the stage and the audience," Sanders said. "There is a level of energy and desire to be clear to the audience that makes it exciting not a distant kind of event."

General admission tickets for "To Kill a Mockingbird" are \$10; \$5 for senior citizens, students and children. They can be purchased online at www.mifafestival.org or at the door the night of the performance.

Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts Victory Theatre with Olde Holyoke Development Corp. are sponsoring the play with the Holyoke Cultural Council.