

'Inherit the Wind' blows into town

Morgan Hill Times

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Lora Schraft



Doug Doughty, as E. K. Hornbeck, performs with a monkey puppet during rehearsals.



Scott Lynch, as Rev. Jeremiah Brown, performs a scene.

'Inherit the Wind' runs through Aug. 27 at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. Aug. 14 and 21, at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. Cost is \$18 for general and \$14 for seniors and students. Tickets can be purchased at the door, at www.svct.org, or at BookSmart, 80 E. Second St., Morgan Hill.

Details: 846-9100 or svct.org.

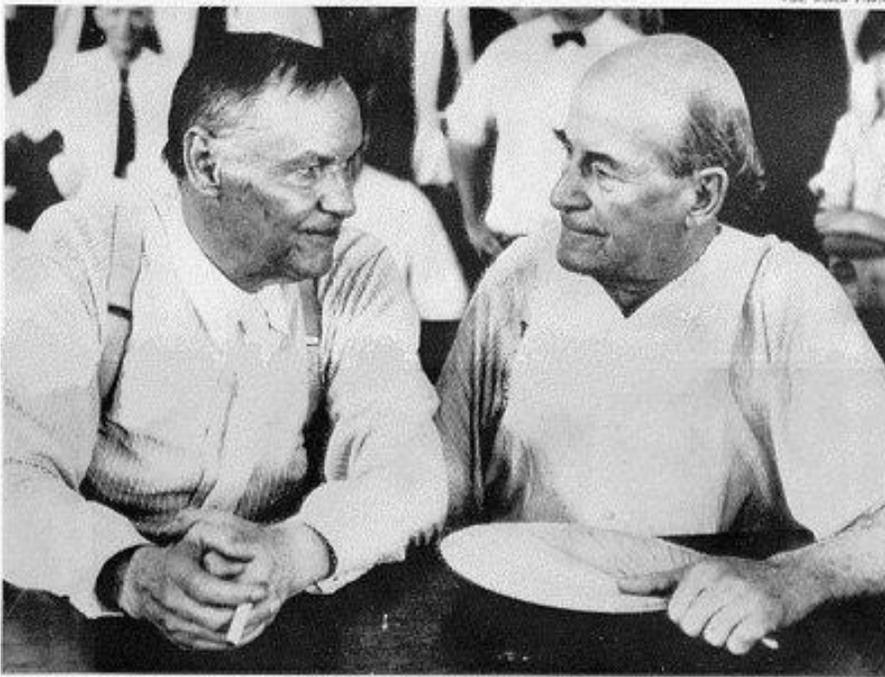


Allen Siverson, as Matthew Harrison Brady, center, performs with the cast of South Valley Civic Theater's 'Inherit the Wind' during dress rehearsals at the South Valley Civic Theater.

Religion, science on trial in ‘Inherit the Wind’

By [Martin Cheek](#)

August 23, 2011



Clarence Darrow (left) and William Jennings Bryan were opposing

Last Friday I found myself sitting in a jury box. With my fellow jurors, I heard opposing arguments in the centuries-old trial of religious faith versus scientific fact. My journey to deliberating on this dynamic debate started when I stepped into the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse to watch a South Valley Civic Theater (SVCT) performance of the American classic “Inherit the Wind.”

The moment I entered the theater, producer Beth Dewey asked if I wanted to participate in that night’s performance. I eagerly accepted her offer to sit on stage as a member of the jury. Ten minutes later, I found myself dressed in a starched white shirt and black bowtie, stepping into the character of a small-minded, small town citizen in the Deep South of the 1920s. When the bailiff called the jurors from our front-row audience seats to the stage’s jury box, we witnessed a battle of legal titans as two opposing lawyers argued the issues of evolution.

The plot of “Inherit the Wind” is based on the historic “Monkey Trial” that took place in a Dayton, Tenn. courthouse in July 1925. The play’s character Henry Drummond (played cynically by James Pearson) is a representation of attorney Clarence Darrow whom the American Civil Liberties Union hired to defend high school biology teacher John Thomas Scopes, who was put on trial for teaching Darwin’s theory of natural selection. The character Matthew Harrison Brady (portrayed with bombastic big-ego gusto by Allen Siverson)

paints a fictionalized portrait of the great American politician William Jennings Bryan. In the Scopes trial, Bryan served as the prosecuting attorney, representing the state of Tennessee – and moral absolutism.

A century or so ago, Bryan was a larger-than-life figure known as “the Great Commoner,” an extremist liberal who unsuccessfully ran as a Democrat for the presidency in 1896, 1900 and 1908. You might compare him in popularity among his followers and personal style of communication to Republican presidential candidate Rick Perry. Bryan, like Perry today, was devoted in his faith in the inerrancy of the Bible and the moral code of Christianity. A brash populist much like Perry, Bryan was a hypnotic orator. He spoke more like a Bible-thumping preacher than a politician, showing absolutely no embarrassment in bringing prayer and praise to God to the campaign trail.

Bryan helped shape modern American politics. He essentially invented today’s campaign tactics of stump tours and tent meetings, using his powers of hypnotizing oratory to fire up followers to vote for him. He stood against the gold standard and corporate trusts. He stood for women’s suffrage and prohibition. He shaped the Democratic Party’s populist themes, paving the way for Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal policies.

As a God-fearing fundamentalist Christian, he promoted the passage of anti-evolution laws by state leaders. He believed teaching that humans evolved from less complex organisms would plant seeds of doubt in young minds about the words of the Bible. Doubting scripture, he felt, would lead to the corrosion of morals.

Bryan’s fervent fight against Darwinism led many state legislatures – especially in the South – to ban public schools from teaching evolution. Tennessee passed the Butler Act of 1925 that prevented teaching the science of human evolution. The American Civil Liberties Union found biology teacher Scopes as a willing participant to test the constitutionality of this law.

In July 1925, Americans sat riveted as they listened on the radio to Monkey Trial attorneys Bryan and Darrow duke out the debate of faith and facts. At one point, Darrow even brought Bryan into the witness box as a Bible expert. Bryan testified the world was not billions of years old but was created 4,000 years before Jesus Christ’s birth.

Considering the strong anti-science bias among many of today’s extreme conservative politicians – especially those whose strict adherence to religious dogma cause them to deny the science of evolution and also of climate change – there’s an irony in the fact that it was Bryan, an extreme liberal politician, who planted in America the seeds of our nation’s distrust in science. Planting seeds of doubt about science is how politicians use dogma to control minds and retain power. Galileo faced much the same trial as Scopes when he battled Catholic Church authorities who feared his teaching the astronomical science of a sun-centered system might undermine their religious supremacy. It didn’t. Likewise, teaching evolution and climate change science to young minds in today’s schools will not undermine their spiritual values and cause immoral behavior in society.

The trial of religious faith versus science facts still goes on in America. Let us heed Proverbs 11:29. If we trouble our own house by preventing young minds from discovering the wonders of science in our nation’s classrooms, we shall inherit the wind.

Theater Review: 'Inherit the Wind' – Evolution and creationism meet in the courtroom

Gregory M. Alonzo

Inherit the Wind is a fictitious account of the actual Scopes “monkey” trial of 1925, in which a high school teacher was criminally prosecuted in Tennessee for teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution. It made its Broadway debut in 1955 to both critical acclaim and box office success. Originally written as an indictment of the attack upon intellectual freedom that had occurred during the McCarthy era, this play’s theme of science versus creationism resonates to this day.

Most of the drama takes place in the courtroom, and credible casting of the two lawyers, who were giants of their time, is a daunting task for a small amateur company. Prosecutor Matthew Harrison Brady (Allen Siverson) is loosely based upon three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, a great orator and statesman. And Henry Drummond (James Pearson) is the legendary criminal defense attorney and ACLU member Clarence Darrow. Remarkably, producer Beth Dewey and director K. DeVette See were able to find a couple of actors perfectly suited for their respective parts.



Siverson, to his credit, refuses to undermine his devout character by falling prey to glib caricature. Instead, he brings a gravitas and dignity to a role that even the playwrights unfairly lampoon on occasion. Pearson, as the agnostic litigator, displays an unerring confidence, keen wit and intelligence, along with an eloquent speaking voice, which are essential to his rather convincing portrayal. And their scenes together are often quite riveting. Bravo!

The set is a utilitarian, albeit somewhat awkward, design by Rob See, featuring a pair of canopies – supporting a large banner of “READ YOUR BIBLE” – located upstage that serves as an entrance to a traditional courtroom setting placed downstage. The spectators (who are often quite vocal) sit on chairs positioned in the area normally reserved for the orchestra pit.

Doug Doughty plays E.K. Hornbeck (aka H.L. Menckin), the cynical, acerbic critic and journalist who covers the case for the *Baltimore Herald*. His condescending, colorful commentary on the Christian fundamentalism of Brady and the rural townsfolk is reminiscent of a Greek chorus and decidedly biased in favor of Bertram Cates, the beleaguered educator (the fine Robert Hamilton). Doughty somehow captures just the right tone of wry humor and derision without ever becoming off-putting.

Of particular note is Scott Lynch as the Reverend Jeremiah Brown, whose sermon of the “Book of Genesis” and rabid condemnation of Cates’ alleged sacrilege – that takes places during a court recess – is truly an inspired, if not downright disturbing, piece of acting.

Charity Berg also impresses as the preacher’s daughter and Cates’ love interest, Rachel Brown, conveying an agonizing ambivalence and genuine dread at her father’s idolatry and intolerance. And she’s adorned with some of the most stunning flapper costuming on stage by Kay Jeni-Spence and Kimberly Lynch.

And one would be remiss if one failed to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of John Brewer, whose exceptional versatility is beyond exemplary, and Zack Goller, Makena McElroy and Wayne Dewey, whose delightful supporting turns transcend the smallness of their roles.

Yes, there are the minor lighting miscues and flubbing of lines typical of community theatre, but the undeniable talent in evidence and the timeliness of the topic make this a highly worthwhile production of an American classic.