



Tough Case

Stage Scenes

Playing Tough

Tough Case, Mary Walsh, Tapestry New Opera and what's going on around the theatre this week

|By Jon Kaplan and Glenn Sumi

The problem with some shows for young audiences is that instructional message becomes more important than theatricality.

That's never a worry with the work of David S. Craig, a fact reinforced by our seeing a public performance of his latest, *Tough Case*, before the production began a tour of Ontario schools.

The piece deals with restorative justice, a concept and practice that brings victim and perpetrator of a crime together, along with involved others, to deal with responsibility, compensation and resolution.

What could be a dry debate takes on dramatic vibrancy in Craig's play, directed by Richard Greenblatt. Beginning with the trashing of a senior's apartment by a gang, we follow the emotional aftermath of the vandalism with the truculent but scared teen who's charged (Kevin Walker), his talkative mother (Burgandy Code), the fearful senior (Linda Goranson), her outraged son (John Cleland) and the restorative justice worker (Lisa Codrington), who has a personal understanding of the teen's background and brings the other characters together.

In Craig's writing and the intense performances, each of the characters is three-dimensional and believable, the only problem being a too-quick resolution. In fairness, though, *Tough Case* is a 50-minute show that understandably has to wrap up its story quickly.

The script brings up community issues of making things better rather than deciding guilt and innocence, but it goes beyond philosophical arguments to become a hard-hitting piece of drama that acknowledges the apprehension and anger involved in the situation.

Restorative justice is a system that's used in Nova Scotia and New Zealand, among other places, and stands in sharp contrast to the Tories' new hard-on-crime bill.

Tough Case is touring not only to schools (for grades seven to 12) but also to some correctional facilities in southwestern Ontario. It would be fascinating to see the reaction it receives there.

Replacing Walsh

With Mary Walsh still recuperating from pneumonia, Theatre Passe Muraille has added a few other shows to fill in for the cancelled performances of *Dancing With Rage*.

[\(For a look at the March 19 reading of Michael Healey's Proud, see here.\)](#)

The Dancing Without Mary program continues with an edition of the Songbook Series, usually an after-hours event at the theatre. The current show (tonight, Thursday, March 22) is dedicated to the music of the Beach Boys, with performances by Susan Cuthbert, Martin Julien, David Fox, Daniel Krolik, the Scadding Court Community Performance Group, Sophia Walker and Suzanne Roberts Smith (Oreo & J Ro Ro) and the Family Band.

Next up, on Saturday (March 24), is a 2 pm matinee of Puppetmongers' Brick Bros. Circus, a family show in which talented bricks perform in a miniature one-ring big top. Guaranteed entertainment for youngsters.

[See listing.](#)

Satisfying Sins

With *The Seven Deadly Sins (And Holier Fare)*, Against the Grain Theatre again proves itself one of the city's most inventive young companies.

The evening of music, dance and cabaret featured a pair of dual-piano works, Steve Reich's *Piano Phase* and John Adams's *Hallelujah Junction*, both played by Christopher Mokrzewski and Daniel Pesca. The subtly shifting former piece also featured choreographer/dancers Matjash Mrozewski and Kate Franklin, working on a slightly raised platform behind the pianos. Effectively cut off visually from the waist down, the dancers did most of their movement with their upper bodies, some strategically placed lights giving extra theatricality to the performance.

Also on the bill was Benjamin Britten's moving *Canticle II*, based on a medieval English miracle play about Abraham and Isaac. Christopher Mayell and Erin Lawson made a touching father and son, with the two singing in unison as the voice of God.

The final portion of the show was Kurt Weill's ironic *The Seven Deadly Sins*, directed by Joel Ivany (who probably did the same for the Britten, though he's not credited). Anna, the central figure, is divided into two characters and both sung (by Lindsay Sutherland Boal) and danced (by Tina Fushell); we follow her journey through the underbelly of America to raise money for a new house for her family (Giles Tomkins, Graham Thomson, Derek Kwan and Andrew Love) in Louisiana.

Sly, clever and enticing, these Sins were indeed seductive.

Tapestry weaving

Tapestry New Opera holds its annual showcase of opera excerpts Sunday (March 25), giving audiences a chance to see the latest developmental stage of four works.

Among the shows is Julie Salverson and Juliette Kiri Palmer's *Shelter*, about a nuclear family adrift in the atomic age; it receives a full production next fall in a co-pro with Edmonton Opera.

Also on the program are Marjorie Chan and John Harris's *M'dea Undone*, a contemporary adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* (a co-pro with Scottish Opera); Norman Yeung and Christiaan Venter's *Black Blood*, in which a father and son confront a creature who offers them both hope and devastation; and *Phaedra*, a text/movement/musical reinvention of the story of Phaedra, who falls in love with her stepson. It's created by Lauren Brotman, Jack Grinhaus and Romeo Candido.

[See listing.](#)

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