

THE CRUCIBLE

2005



Salem lessons to be learned

WITH uncanny timing, barely a fortnight after the playwright's death, Teddington Theatre Club has brought one of Arthur Miller's most powerful plays to the Hampton stage.

Set in Puritan Massachusetts in 1692, **The Crucible** explores the struggles of conscience of one man, John Proctor, trapped in the Salem witch-hunts. The play was based on historical events but the inspiration for Miller was McCarthyism in which he himself became embroiled.

The **Crucible** is huge in both its dramatic breadth and emotional depth, but this production expands all the dimensions of the play. Director, John Buckingham raises the emotional temperature to white-heat in an outstanding production of Miller's classic drama.

From its high-tingle factor opening to dark denouement, the audience was totally captivated. I was concerned this highly pitched approach would not be sustainable throughout a long performance and would

Richmond Drama Awards

Mark Aspen

burn itself out. However, there was enough balance and contrast to fuel a continuing fire.

The strong cast created many memorable portraits of a society disintegrating by its own dissensions. John Roth played the Rev Parris with anguished intensity as he became gradually ensnared in the collective paranoia.

I was struck that the parable in the play is just as pertinent fifty years on (and is probably timeless). Today's witch-hunt is political correctness. John Proctor's lament, "The cry of the harlot has taken away my good name", will resonate with many in the public gaze.

Teddington Theatre Club's memorial to Miller is a fitting tribute to a playwright recognised as one of America's greatest dramatists.

Paying tribute to Miller

TEDDINGTON Theatre Club's production of *The Crucible* was originally scheduled as an anticipated celebration of playwright, Arthur Miller's 90th birthday in 2005.

But, with the announcement of the great writer's death on February 10, the production is now dedicated to his memory.

In the past few days, tributes have been paid, naming Miller as arguably the greatest American playwright of the 20th Century, and *The Crucible* among his finest works.

Today it is probably best known through the 1996 film version starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder.

But ever since its first staging in 1953, Miller's dynamic depiction of the 17th century Puritan Salem witch-hunts has taken on powerful contemporary resonance.

Originally it was seen as an

allegory of the persecution of Miller's friends and colleagues by Senator McCarthy's notorious 'un-American activities.'

Today, we do not have to look far to recognise the relevance of the play's depiction of a fundamentalist Christian American society, divided within itself and possessed by fear of a demonic enemy.

If the timing of Miller's birthday celebration was unfortunate, TTC was luckier with another anniversary.

By a bizarre coincidence, the play's opening night on Saturday marks the exact date that the real Salem witch-hunts began in 1692.

TTC's production of Miller's *The Crucible*, directed by John Buckingham, plays at Hampton Hill Playhouse from Saturday until March 5.

■ Box office and membership details available on 020 8979 9499 (2-9pm only).



WITCH HUNT: John Kipps and Merlyn Lowther as John and Elizabeth Proctor