

# 'Indecent' traces complex history of Judasim, love and control

By MARY CUSACK

Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.'s final play of the season is a must-see for more reasons than can be covered in one review. Key among those reasons is that "Indecent" serves as a cautionary

## "Indecent"

Peppermint Creek Theatre  
Through Sunday, June 18  
Alternating showtimes:  
8 p.m. and 2 p.m.  
\$17 general admission  
\$12 students & seniors  
6025 Curry Lane, Lansing  
(517) 372-0945  
peppermintcreek.org

members of the LGBTQ community.

The play tells the true story of the rise and fall of a Yiddish play called "God of Vengeance." Written in 1906 by Sholem Asch (Connor Kelly), a Jewish writer living in Poland, the play was controversial from its creation because it dealt with the seedy underworld of prostitution in the Jewish community. Against that background, a forbidden love develops as the daughter (Sally Hecksel) of the brothel owner (Mark Zussman) and his most lucrative prostitute (Janet Colson) fall in love. In his fury upon discovering the relationship, he defiles a Torah.

"Indecent" is a play-within-a-play, tracing the evolution of "God of Vengeance" over several decades, as it is successfully produced across Europe, and eventually lands in New

tale about history repeating itself, which is especially relevant as national political movements attempt to oppress women and mem-

York City. The play is successful until a butchered adaptation is introduced on Broadway that draws the attention of a prominent Jewish rabbi (Jim Coyer), who conspires to have the cast arrested and charged with a violation of obscenity laws. Although the cast continue to defend themselves and the artistic merit of the play, Asch turns his back on it and them. The cast returns to Europe to continue performing the play at the most inopportune time, the brink of the Holocaust.

The structure of "Indecent" may seem a bit confusing at first, but it pays off in the long run. The bulk of the play is bookended by the premise that the cast of "God" is replaying the history of the play's production. A denouement wraps up Asch's complex relationship with his brainchild. Along the way, helpful and clever overhead projections provide key guidance for navigating shifting languages and "blinks in time."

The cast members perform multiple roles, playing both the actors and the characters that they portray in "God," as well as the historical figures who influenced the creation and suppression of the work. The Klezmer musicians played by Tamara Hicks-Syron, Jeff Boerger and Andy Callis, fill in various roles as well.

While "Indecent" serves as important documentation of the historical importance of Yiddish theatre, it is much more than just that. Even though



Courtesy Photo

Janet Ehrlich Colson (left) and Sally Hecksel portray a forbidden love affair between a prostitute and a brothel owner's daughter.

Asch is crushed by the overwhelmingly inhuman events of the Holocaust and McCarthy's Red Scare, the fact that "Indecent" is keeping his story alive provides hope. Additionally, without providing spoilers, audiences are ultimately rewarded with a hauntingly beautiful scene of human connection.

Director Mary Job took on an incredible challenge to produce this complex piece at the community theatre level. Fortunately, the Lansing area has a wealth of talent, and the cast is solid. There is particular veracity in the connections between the characters portrayed by Kelly, Hecksel and Colson. While portraying more minor characters, Judith Evans has several oppor-

tunities to display her considerable acting and singing chops. As the naïf, Lemml, Joe Clark guides his character through a maturation that sees the earnest stage manager become the champion of "God of Vengeance."

The selection of "Indecent" is a fitting denouement to Peppermint Creek's 2018-19 season. The conclusion of the play mirrors the eternal optimism of the value of theaters in the world, as this is the last play it produces in the Miller Performing Arts Center. Just as a hopeful young director pledges to Asch that he will keep "Indecent" alive, Peppermint Creek will persist in life at a new location for its 2019-20 season.