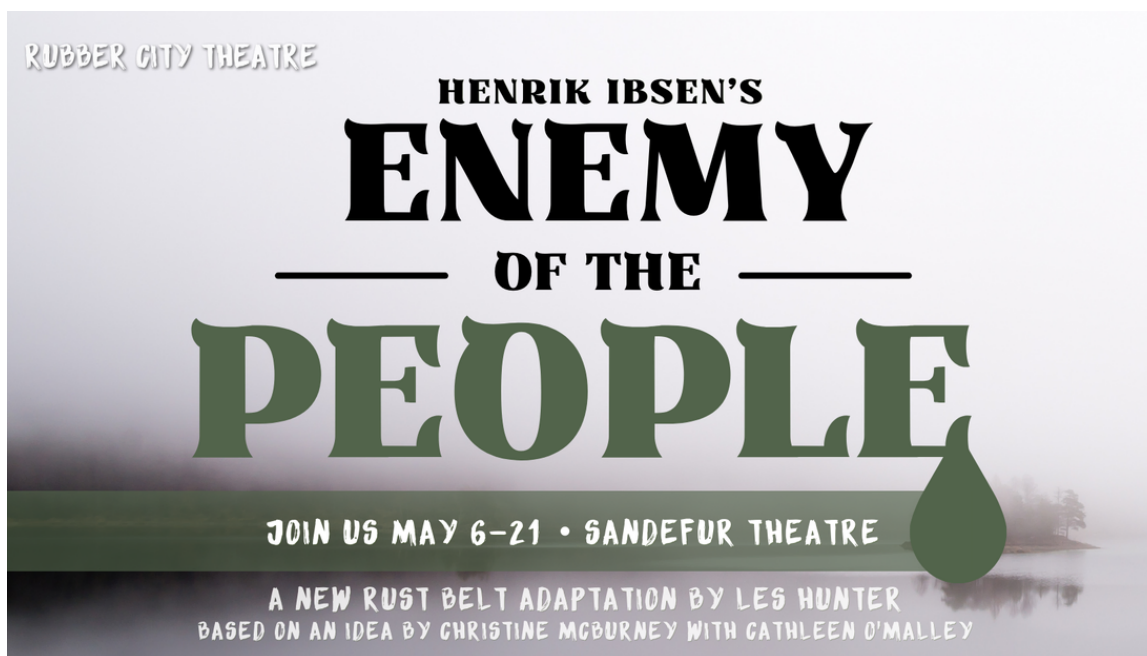


Rubber City Theatre's 'Enemy of the People' is a bitter but needed pill to swallow



Spoiler Alert! Contrary to my usual style of reviewing I will be revealing quite a bit more of the story. If this bothers you to any degree, stop reading...now. Don't worry, I won't be offended.

Still here? Good. Let us list the characters of Henrik Ibsen's "Enemy of the People" adapted by Les Hunter based on an idea by Christine McBourney with Cathleen O'Malley currently being produced by Rubber City Theatre.

First there is Dr. Tammie "Tam" Stockman (Courtney Elizabeth Brown) who is a "country doctor" as well as medical examiner for the area. She is married to Kate Lee (Jennifer Ruth) and they have a daughter, Petra (Arianna Allen). Tam's brother, Peter Stockman (Jeff Haffner) is the mayor of their mid-size rust belt city that has been in economic decline for many years with the closing of all the factories. Billy Wynnefield is the editor of the local "Summit Journal" newspaper that has been owned for generations by Heather (Katie Wells) family but lately has been struggling. Billy has been seeing Petra on a regular basis. Anthony Kalan (Stuart Hoffman) is the head of the local Chamber of Commerce and is a major mover and shaker in the area. Lastly, there is Martin who is the father of Tam and Peter. Martin has made a huge fortune on fracking wells in the area.

The city seems to be on the cusp of turning around. A natural spring has been discovered that is purported to have healing properties. This has brought new business's downtown and new wealth to the area in anticipation of the hoards of tourist who will be descending on the city. There is just one tiny problem.

Dr. Tam has made a discovery. Following multiple tests by various universities she has found that the spring water is polluted with various chemicals as a result of the extensive practice of fracking in the area. These include benzene, xylene and ethylene glycol among an entire list of other "ene's" in the mix of 1,084 chemicals used in the fracking process that "may" be hazardous to human health. There is also the danger of significant earth quakes due to the shifting of the plates under the surface. This news threatens to halt the impending and highly anticipated opening of the spring to the public. In order to tap a safer spring Peter has found that they would need \$30 million and three years. The city has neither the time nor the money. They are in a "now or never" situation.

Dr. Tam decides to educate the citizens of the area by publishing an article about her findings in the local paper with the support of Heather and Billy. Without her knowledge, the paper has been purchased by

members of the Chamber of Commerce through the efforts of Anthony Kalan thus killing the story. She then calls a town meeting thinking "Truth will always win out over dishonesty and tyranny" but instead of being hailed as a hero is branded as an enemy and discredited.

Lastly, Peter reveals to Tam that her father, Martin, has sold all of his fracking holdings and purchased the entire spring water works which due to the rumors of pollution was purchased on the cheap. He has put the ownership in Tam's name. Although she had nothing to do with the transaction Peter points out that there will be accusations of impropriety and collusion "if word gets out." As all of this tragedy unfolds, an earth quake hits Tam's home damaging the roof letting in the rain.

In spite of the very austere set by Travis Daniel Williams (a few chairs, a table, some industrial size steam pipes and a wall phone with huge cinder block walls in the back ground and stairs going to a single door) the cast is able to portray some moments of believability into the proceedings. Although the show starts off in jerks and spurts, once the actors get their legs under them it picks up speed. While not a flawless production due to the unevenness of the acting it is still a strong enough story to make it worth seeing.

The show is aptly directed by Lana Sugarman. The austere Lighting Design is by James Kyle Davis. In spite of the huge stage area, Hazen Tobar's Sound Design works well especially with the various sound effects although the texting sequence sounds could have been toned down a bit. Brian C. Seckfort handles the Projection Design very well. Irene Mack-Shafer's costume design is modern and appropriate.

If you are looking for an underground hero that makes good kind of show...forget it. This play is a real downer. In this tale of greed at all expense the bad guys win, the good guys lose and innocent people may get sick and die as a result. It is a raw story right out of today's headlines and a cautionary tale of what continues to happen since 1882 when the play was first written. No sugar coating on this one but more a strong taste of bitter salt. Good Theater!

Les Hunter's adaptation of Henrick Isben's "Enemy of the People" will be staged by Rubber City Theatre at their temporary home in Guzzetta Hall at 228 E. Buchtel Avenue, Akron, Ohio (caddy-corner to E. J. Thomas Hall). Free parking is in the garage just west of the hall. Enter on the north entrance and follow the signs to the theater. For more information and tickets go to <https://www.rubbercitytheatre.com/> or call (234) 252-0272.