



'THE SHOEMAKER': Oscar nominee Danny Aiello is compelling in the otherwise ineffectual 9/11 drama, *The Shoemaker*. Photo: Ben Hider.



Theater Review

The Shoemaker:

Aiello compelling, but 9/11 drama disappoints

THE SHOEMAKER

Written by Susan Charlotte

Directed by Antony Marsellis

Through August 14, 2011

The Acorn Theatre

410 West 42nd Street, (212-239-6200)

www.causecelebre.info

By Scott Harrah

The tragedy of 9/11 will mark its 10th anniversary this year. To America, 9/11 will always be a day of sad reflection and remembrance of the innocent souls we lost and the first attacks ever on our mainland. It was a decade ago, but it's still chilling to even think about that day. For a stage drama, it is far too complex a topic to tackle because there were so many sad, eerie stories that will always haunt people that experienced one of the worst days in American history. This is why a show like *The Shoemaker* is especially frustrating to watch. Although playwright Susan Charlotte has good intentions with her story of an Italian-Jewish shoemaker (Danny Aiello) interacting with a customer (Alma Cuervo) on 9/11, the script is full of holes and goes in far too many directions. However, Mr. Aiello manages to make the most of the limited material and gives an outstanding performance.

The sheer horror of what actually happened on September 11, 2001, is something many of us of have yet to comprehend. For New Yorkers, 9/11 is not something that can easily be explained or even chronicled in a stage drama. There have been a noble few attempts, however. A far superior drama about the tragedy, *The Guys* in 2003 (later made into an indie film starring Sigourney Weaver and Anthony LaPaglia) worked because it was simplistic and gave us a grim slice of real life. That play, based on actual events, was about a woman helping a fire captain write eulogies for all the men on his team lost in the towers.

Ms. Charlotte's *The Shoemaker*, on the other hand, is far too convoluted for its own good. Instead of focusing on just one true story and the confusion and utter shock everyone in New York City was experiencing that day, the playwright spins an often confusing yarn about a man in his 70s grappling with his troubled past and present: his late father, an Italian Jew who was a Holocaust victim; and a grown daughter who chooses to study abroad in France instead of staying closer to home. As the play opens, the shoemaker sits in his closed shop, listening to the aria "Nessun Dorma" when customer Hilary (Cuervo) bursts in and demands that he fix the sole of her shoe because she's walked all the way from the Financial District to Hell's Kitchen and still has a long way to go to get home.

The story starts out with much promise, as the two wonder about the whereabouts of Louise, a young customer that may or may not be missing downtown. It is never made clear whether Louise actually works in the World Trade Center, but the shoemaker becomes belligerent as Hilary keeps asking what floor the young lady's office is on. If Ms. Charlotte would have stuck to just the story of Louise, it would have been sufficient watching how the lives of these characters intersect.

Instead, the narrative is padded with a confusing subplot involving the shoemaker speaking with his dead father (the offstage voice of Michael Twaine) about the Nazi occupation of Italy during World War II. The Holocaust was indeed a tragedy, but it happened decades earlier and has nothing to do with 9/11. There is absolutely no discernible thread that connects the two events.

Besides Mr. Aiello, the other bright performance here is given by Lucy DeVito as Louise, in an effervescent scene between her and the shoemaker.

Director Antony Marsellis needs to take some responsibility here for the disappointing outcome of this show. A good director would have pointed out the script's flaws to Ms. Charlotte and cut out the unnecessary elements. The show was originally a one act, but in this latest incarnation has been expanded into two acts. Why is anyone's guess. There are so many powerful stories about 9/11 that have yet to be told, and it is truly a shame that *The Shoemaker* cannot effectively showcase even one of them.

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