



Never the Sinner

by John Logan

*Best Off-Broadway Play
Outer Critics Circle Award*

Now playing until Nov. 22nd

[Ticket Info](#)

Reviews for Pisces Moon Productions' *Never The Sinner*

[Bruce Bratton Online](#)

"I've said many times that Pisces Moon productions present the finest plays certainly in our county. Their newest play, *Never the Sinner* with no qualifications, is excellent theatre. The play itself, the casting, directing, the set, everything about Pisces Moon's newest production reminds us of just how much power live theatre has when it's done right. Seeing this play and realizing the multiple plots it contains is as if this crime happened today... The play develops the story of Leopold and Loeb, their relationship, their planning of the murder of Bobby Franks and the world famous trial with Clarence Darrow for the defense. It runs weekends now through November 22. Don't miss *Never the Sinner* at Actors' Theatre."

[Santa Cruz Sentinel](#)

"'Sinner' captures essence of '20s crime . . . The Pisces Moon production is strong and passionate."
[click here to read the full review](#)

[Good Times Santa Cruz](#)

"powerful and haunting . . . another outstanding achievement by this revered small-town theater company that should have the verve to consider performing in San Francisco."
[click here to read the full review](#)

[Register-Pajaronian](#)

"The crime of Leopold and Loeb still captures our imagination and raises the question 'Why?'. This must-see Pisces Moon production supplies some of the answers."
[click here to read the full review](#)

Previews for Pisces Moon Productions' *Never The Sinner*

Santa Cruz Sentinel, By NANCY REDWINE Into the dark of Leopold and Loeb

It was a disturbing crime and a sensational trial. And now it's a compelling and fascinating play: "Never the Sinner," opening Friday at the Actors' Theatre. This newest work of Pisces Moon ("The Laramie Project") deals with the 1924 trial of Richard "Dickie" Loeb and Nathan "Babe" Leopold in Chicago. Charged with the cold-blooded murder of Loeb's cousin, the wealthy young men (who were also lovers) became the object of inflammatory media attention and the obsessive fascination of the country. "Never the

"Sinner" written by John Logan (who went on to write screenplays for "Gladiator" and "Any Given Sunday") was 20 years in the research and writing, and has been hailed for its "impressive scope and daringness." Directed by Susan Myer, who co-produces with Christopher Sugarman, the production plays with the relationships between the four men: Loeb, Leopold, anti-death penalty defense lawyer Clarence Darrow and prosecutor Robert Crowe. Richard Loeb is played by Christopher Sugarman, Leopold by Gabriel Ross, Darrow by Chad Davies, Crowe by George Joyce, and a variety of ensemble roles by Becky Armor and Heather Brown-Huber. If "The Laramie Project" is any indication of what these folks can do, get your tickets early.

Good Times Santa Cruz, by Christa Martin

Hate the sin but never the sinner. Everyone's heard the phrase, but what you do with it is another matter. Consider this: With every sane intention, two brilliant men killed a 14-year-old boy in 1924. Should they have died? The dramatic tale has been discussed for years. It's the story about the infamous murder trial of Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold. Converted into a play, the heavy story is being told by none other than the theater company in town known for approaching and producing excellent works that are controversial and make people think: Pisces Moon Productions. The play is directed by the ever-impressive Susan Myer and her cast includes local favorites: Christopher Sugarman, Chad Davies, Gabriel Ross, George Joyce, Becky Armor, Chad Stender, Heather Brown-Huber and Kathleen Palmer.

Bruce Bratton Online, By Bruce Bratton

PLAN ON THIS. Pisces Moon Productions continually present the most challenging plays in our area. Every production I've seen of theirs (The Laramie Project, Durang, Durang, The Food Chain, The Altruists, etc.) has been excellent theatre. Well, there was one a while back that wasn't so hot, but never mind that. They're now doing John Logan's "Never The Sinner" opening Friday, October 24 at 8 p.m. at Actors' Theatre at 1001 Center Street. It'll play every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8 p.m. and two Sundays. The Bear Republic Theatre used to do challenging plays locally, and so did some other short lived groups but stick with Pisces Moon productions.



Reviews of Never The Sinner

"...a dark drama of impressive scope and daringness." Phoenix Sun

"...this play [is an] emotional and intellectual force." New York Times

"...enormously thought-provoking... [an] exceptionally well-paced, compelling ... story" CurtainUp, Washington, D.C.



On a sunlit spring afternoon, 19-year-old Nathan Leopold and 18-year-old Richard Loeb were cruising their upscale neighborhood. Nattily dressed, winsome and carefree, they bandied about whom they'd find, follow and invite to sit in "Babe" Leopold's red Willys-Knight with them. At 5:30 p.m., they pulled up beside 14-year-old Bobby Franks, Dickie Loeb's cousin. They offered him a ride, and he climbed into the back seat of the car. A few seconds later, Loeb grabbed a chisel he had hidden and smashed it into the back of Bobby's skull. It was Wednesday, May 21, 1924, and these self-described "ubermensch" had planned and executed the

perfect crime, marred only by Dickie's annoyance that he'd have to throw away his blood-soaked suit.

Dubbed the "crime of the century", Babe, Dickie and their trial became a national fixation, inflamed by a whirl of record media attention. It took the considerable legal skills of Clarence Darrow, an anti death penalty crusader, to spare the boys from hanging. Decades later, the subject still holds us in its thrall. Countless fiction and non-fiction books have probed it, and in 2002, Sandra Bullock produced a film, "Murder by Numbers", in which she played a detective in the grip of a similar case.

Winner of the 1998 Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Play, "Never the Sinner" was written by John Logan, who has also written the screenplays for "Gladiator" and "Any Given Sunday." Logan spent 20 years researching, writing and rewriting "Never the Sinner", which began as an assignment in a college playwriting class. The first version debuted in 1983 at Northwestern University when Logan was a senior there. The play premiered in Chicago in 1985 and opened on the West End in London in 1990 at the Playhouse Theatre, and has been seen in Australia, South Africa, Germany and on the London Fringe.

"Never the Sinner" will open October 24th, 2003.

[Get your tickets now!](#)





Full Review Santa Cruz Sentinel

October 30, 2003

'Sinner' captures essence of '20s crime

By ANN BENNETT

SENTINEL THEATER REVIEWER

What was once dubbed the "crime of the century" has been long forgotten — or at least superseded by other more recent, more gruesome, more multiple murders.

But for sheer cold-blooded shock, the 1924 Leopold-Loeb trial for the pointless murder of a 14-year-old boy can still call forth a sense of incomprehensible horror. John Logan's play, "Never the Sinner," now being presented by Pisces Moon at the Actors' Theater in Santa Cruz, captures the essence of that crime, the murderers and the trial in a compelling drama.

Logan's non-linear play moves back and forth in time and context, offering, in a series of dramatic vignettes, a look at the crime itself, an impressive rendering of the courtroom skills of famed defense attorney Clarence Darrow, and a view of the frenzied media attention that the trial stirred up.

But most of all, his script illustrates perfectly the personalities of 19-year-olds Nathan "Babe" Leopold and Richard "Dickie" Loeb and the intricate relationship that developed between them.

Advertisement

Both boys came from rich families and both were extraordinarily bright, entering college at the age of 14. But it was their differences rather than their similarities that defined their relationship, and it is this study of their individuality that clarifies their attraction for each other.

The Pisces Moon production is strong and passionate. Director Susan Myer knows well how to keep her cast under tight control and this kind of script demands that treatment.

The taut, short scenes pulse with drama as they bounce about in time from early views of the boys' friendship to later ones that explore their commitment to each other and to their self-described "ubermensch" superiority, to longer looks at the trial itself, and to small evocative glimpses into the emotional make-up of these two complex young men.

Myer directs this stylistic shifting of focus with confidence, and it is very effective. Less effective, perhaps, are the assorted small intrusions offered by Becky Armor and Heather Huber-Brown in their reporter roles.

I realize these are intended to establish context (although a proper flag could have taken care of some of that) and move the story along, but often they serve only to interrupt. And it's not really necessary to know that the Merchandise Mart is having a sale.

Most successful are the primary roles, and here is where Myer's direction shines. The strong performance by Gabriel Ross as Babe Leopold is splendid; Ross's intensity is almost palpable, and he interprets the role with an uncanny ability to portray Babe's complex intellectual and emotional depths. Christopher Sugarman establishes the personality of Dickie Loeb with equal confidence; a contrasting image of ego and control, Sugarman manages just the right amount of superficial flippancy to provide the protective covering for his sociopathic instincts.

Chad Davies does a resounding job with the rich role of Clarence Darrow, easily achieving the shambling stance and rhetorical style of the famed attorney as he defended the seemingly indefensible from the hangman's noose.

George Joyce takes a more strident approach as prosecutor Robert Crowe, but his presence is effective and compelling. The play uses a simple set to account for a variety of scenes, and Django Hulphers accomplishes a great deal with his versatile design and very impressive lighting.

Costumes from the 1920s era by Maria Crush and Christopher Sugarman cleverly underscore the individuality of the characters.

"Never the Sinner" is a very provocative experience. The play challenges us to explore the kind of pathological personality that most of us instinctively abhor — and it does this with a profound impact.

In Chicago in 1924, two apparently conscienceless young men murdered a child. For no reason. With no remorse. Here is your chance to get to know them.

Contact Ann Bennett at svreeken@santa-cruz.com .

If You Go

WHAT : 'Never the Sinner.'

WHERE : Actors' Theater, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz.

WHEN : Through Nov. 22, with performances at 8 p.m Thursday, Friday and Saturdays. and 3 p.m. Sundays, Nov. 9 and 16. Thursdays are two-for-one.

TICKETS : \$15, \$12 seniors and full-time students with I.D.

DETAILS : 420-5260.

Full Review The Good Times Santa Cruz

Sinner's A Winner

Pisces Moon Productions stages another dynamic show with 'Never The Sinner'
By Christa Martin

There's the old adage that we're supposed to love the sinner but not the sin. Does that apply to those who commit grotesque acts of murder? That question is explored in "Never the Sinner," another stunning play by Pisces Moon Productions, which recently opened at the Actors' Theatre in downtown Santa Cruz.

Pisces Moon, never a company to produce fluffy theatrical fare, is known for intellectually challenging its audience. The company's recent production of "The Laramie Project" was downright applaudable and it continues to uphold an uncompromising standard: strong acting, outstanding direction and compelling stories.

"Never The Sinner" is vastly different than previous Pisces Moon offerings. For starters, it's a straight-up drama, with only a few small uncomfortable laughs. Producers' Susan Myer and Christopher Sugarman dive into a subject matter here that is more than unsettling. But, they've done it with aplomb. At first glance, a play about two murderers doesn't seem to have many attractive selling points—playwright John Logan's (*Gladiator* and *Any Given Sunday*) main characters do not seem to have any shred of morals. But under Myer's direction, the play is crafted the right way. The show is powerful and haunting.

"Never the Sinner," set in 1924, is the story about what was called "the trial of the century." It chronicles two young men, Richard Loeb (Christopher Sugarman) and Nathan Leopold (Gabriel Ross), who, out of curiosity, see if they could get away with murdering a 14-year-old boy. The real-life event spawned a trial surrounded by media frenzy as the boys and their lawyers waited to see if Loeb and Leopold would be served the death penalty.

This play is also a trial in our minds. It challenges our perspectives on the death penalty, among other things, and it's a trial for Pisces Moon, which has the guts to stage emotionally heavy plays.

Daring theatergoers should see "Never the Sinner." The disturbing subject matter, and the fact that we see the murder mimed out onstage, is, at times, intense. (It could be too much for some audience members.) The pace of the play, which is not "action-packed"—there's a lot of talking heads—ebbs and flows. Sometimes it's very hot and strong on stage, other times, it lapses into tedium, but this is no fault to Pisces Moon, it's merely the nature of the play. The only criticism: Logan should have trimmed down some of the dialogue—his work is about 20 minutes too long and, at times, watching this courtroom drama play out can be challenging. (At times, it can become boring to watch and listen to any lawyer—even if he's a great actor.) Otherwise, this really is another outstanding achievement by this revered small-town theater company that should have the verve to consider performing in San Francisco.

"Never the Sinner" also asks: Who, if anyone, deserves the death penalty? If we are to hate the sin but not the sinner, does that mean these two men, Loeb and Leopold, should be executed? Or, should their sins be hated, or maybe even forgiven, yet their lives spared?

As Loeb, Sugarman offers some of his best work seen on a Santa Cruz stage in a role that we've never seen him in before, one that requires raging anger, an emotion that typically can't be faked onstage. It must come from the gut. His Loeb is a handsome, charismatic, brilliant man with a wretched passion for violence. He often smacks Leopold around onstage, and is prone to severe yelling streaks. We see the rawness of a troubled, young man and Sugarman offers an excellent performance.

"I think that the first thing I had to do (to get into the mind of a killer) was to look at him as a young man," Sugarman says. "What he's passionate about, unfortunately, is killing someone. It's up to me to be passionate, bring my passion (to the stage). Loeb has a sexual passion for violence and Leopold has a sexual passion for Loeb. I have no technique. I just sit with him and feel passionate and then it comes out."

His accomplice to the murder is Leopold, played superbly by Gabriel Ross, who, like Sugarman, absolutely embodies his character, who is the epitome of a geek: a pale, trembling, bird lover; an

über nerd who wears glasses and lusts after Loeb. Ross is perfectly cast. He pulls off this quirky, troubled character.

Joining them in a very natural and fresh performance is George Joyce who plays prosecuting attorney Robert Crowe. Joyce joins the Pisces Moon cast and fits in perfectly with Myer's standard to stage talented actors. Delicious to watch are the spats between he and defense attorney Clarence Darrow (Chad Davies), who is also perfectly cast as the man who has never lost a death penalty case.

Rounding out the cast are two women who play a myriad different roles: Becky Armor and Heather Huber-Brown. Although they are supporting characters, the women stand out and do a great job.

The sets and costumes all fit the scene for an early 1920s horrific crime that switches between planning the crime, the crime itself, bedroom antics between the men, the courtroom drama, interviews with the men and the jailhouse. The scenes are not linear, but the audience is still able to easily follow the story. It's an uncomfortable, true tale, one that will stay with you. Those who are for the death penalty may rethink their perspective, and those against it may do the same. Above all, kudos to Pisces Moon for, once again, shaking up its fans and leaving them curious anticipating its next show.

"Never the Sinner" runs until Nov. 22 at the Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz. For more information or to purchase tickets, call 420-5260, www.sccat.org, www.piscesmoon.org or buy them at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium box office. The show plays at 8 p.m., Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and Sunday, Nov. 9 and Nov. 16. Tickets are \$15/general, \$12/senior/students with ID; Thursdays are two-for-one.

Full Review The Register-Pajaronian

1920s super-predators Leopold and Loeb featured in 'Never the Sinner' at the Actors' Theatre
Oct 31 2003 12:00AM By

By JOYCE D. MANN

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Pisces Moon opens the new season at Actors' Theatre with a powerful production of John Logan's "Never the Sinner." The play deals with a real-life murder that shook the United States in 1924. It examines the motivation of the killers, 19-year-old Nathan "Babe" Leopold and 18-year-old Richard "Dickie" Loeb, and brings us the highlights of their trial.

The play opens with Leopold (Gabriel Ross) lecturing on birds of prey. He is fascinated by raptors and the ways in which they select their victims. This interest would probably have remained academic had Leopold not encountered Loeb (Christopher Sugarman). These two wealthy young men form a deadly liaison that leads to the thrill killing of 14-year-old Bobby Franks, and the long-term incarceration of Leopold and Loeb.

The story unfolds episodically, switching between the developing relationship of the young men and the trial. It's clear that Loeb is the mastermind who sees himself as a Nietzschean superman. Leopold is enamored of Loeb and does anything to please his lover.

The sexuality depicted in the play is complex. Leopold is clearly homosexual, but Loeb seems more of a sexual opportunist. He uses his golden boy image to draw Leopold into a criminal web. On the other hand, his boyish charm in court dazzles the female public, and he is bombarded with fan

mail.

Both young men are geniuses. Why then did they choose to use their talents to murder Franks? Why did Leopold make a simple error that quickly brought about their arrest?

The play's episodic style, familiar to TV audiences, is becoming a staple of stage plays. Without expert direction, the sound-bytes could have been both confusing and aggravating. However, Director Susan Myer brings her usual skill and sensitivity to bear on the play. The transitions are clear-cut and the action is lean and taut and moves along at a quick pace.

Myer has also assembled an excellent cast. Sugarman and Ross are brilliant as the two murderers. They capture the essence of the hectic 1920s world of wealth and privilege. It's difficult to say who is the more chilling.

Sugarman's amoral Loeb is totally without remorse. His façade cracks when he realizes that his mother has abandoned him during the trial. He's clearly capable of emotion, albeit a self-serving emotion. As psychiatrists point out, he's the little boy who never grew up and who still confides in his teddy bear.

Ross' Leopold is repressed and introverted. It's obvious that his infatuation with Loeb has driven his behavior. Ross' performance is subtle and understated. In every movement and action there is never a moment when he is anybody other than Leopold.

Chad Davies is the aging Clarence Darrow brought in to defend the two young criminals. Appalled by the crime, when a guilty plea is entered, his main goal is to avert the death penalty. Davies is moving in his summation as he pleads for the lives of the boys and excoriates the barbarity of the death penalty. It's a sad commentary that almost 80 years after Darrow's impassioned pleas we're still struggling with the question of the death penalty and, if anything, have become more draconian.

George Joyce is convincing as the fashionable and ambitious young prosecuting attorney, Robert Crowe. His style contrasts with Davies as they square off against each other. His goal is to send the murderers to the gallows and advance his own career.

Rounding out the cast are Becky Armor and Heather Huber-Brown, who both bring a strong stage presence to a variety of roles. As reporters, they show the press frenzy that went on during the trial. Their crisp staccato delivery also provides a narrative of events. As psychiatrists who interview the two boys, they find themselves at times outmatched. Armor also has a humorous little cameo as a police officer, and Huber-Brown is Loeb's confused and frustrated girlfriend.

Django Hulphers' set design is simple and effective. He converts the small stage into no less than 13 scenes. Hulphers is also responsible for the light design, which enables swift scene changes. The costumes (Maria Crush and Christopher Sugarman) are wonderful and reflect the elegance of the 1920s.

In the last 80 years, the world has witnessed dozens of senseless and appalling crimes, committed by people from all walks of life. However, the crime of Leopold and Loeb still captures our imagination and raises the question "Why?" This must-see Pisces Moon production supplies some of the answers.

"Never the Sinner" runs through Nov. 22 at Actors' Theatre, 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz. Curtain time Thursday through Saturday is 8 p.m. There are Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. on Nov. 9 and 16. For tickets, call 420-5260.

