

L.A. TIMES, “THE GUIDE”

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"The people of Boise tried to "stamp out" homosexuality. They discovered it couldn't be done. In the learning process, everybody suffered." — CBS News, 1967 On November 2, 1955, the citizens of Boise, Idaho, woke to headlines screaming about the arrest of three men for 'infamous crimes against nature'. This marked the beginning of an anti-homosexual witch-hunt that saw dozens of local men jailed, their reputations and lives in tatters. The authorities, determined to purge the city of 'deviant' individuals, created a moral panic, encouraging families to feel threatened by a 'ring of predators', and engendering a climate of accusation and counter-accusation reminiscent of nothing less than Salem in 1692. One of many so-called 'Lavender Scares' of the McCarthy era, which saw thousands of American men and women questioned as closely about their sexuality as their politics, the situation in Idaho attracted national interest: that December, Time Magazine ran an article about the dangers of the 'homosexual underworld' in Boise. Moral panics, though intense, are usually short-lived. Less than a year later, prosecution cases crumbled through lack of evidence, and the whole shameful scandal was swept under the carpet of history. But the damage – in terms of life sentences and suicides – had already been done. Gene Franklin Smith's new play, *Boise, U.S.A.*, explores the emotional drama behind the headlines. While the Mayor, "Buck" Jones (George McDaniel), fans the flames of the outcry in the hope of pleasing electors – and taking out a couple of political rivals – other citizens, especially the state psychiatrist, Dr Jack Butler (Seamus Dever), plead for caution and compassion. The lead accuser is a teenage rent boy, Eldon Halverson (Westley Thornton), a conflicted, sleazy mess of a human being, torn between the desire to manipulate and the need to please. Coached into making accusation after accusation by the black-hearted former FBI agent, Will Fairchild (Craig Robert Young), Eldon points his finger at some prominent men in town. The police chief, Blaine Evans (Nic D'Avirro) only needs the flimsiest of evidence to round up

citizens on 'moral charges. One of the accused is Joe Moore (Kris Kamm), kind-hearted family man and bank president. His gradual disintegration under the weight of the allegations forms the heart of the drama. Eventually, inevitably, even his loyal wife, Doris (Melissa Kite) is forced to condemn her husband. The Mayor is powerless to stop the conflagration he has created, even when it engulfs his West Point cadet son, Frank (Matty Ferraro), his brother Herbert (Cameron Mitchell, Jr), and his daughter, Marjorie (Audrey Moore). Boise, U.S.A shines a light on a very shady, but lesser known, aspect of recent history. Its central message, about the dangers of mindless conformity, is chilling. Yet this is not merely soapbox drama. Arturo Castillo's fluid direction keeps the narrative flowing, and engages the audience in the anguish of a whole community. Fine performances maintain the focus on the human tragedy at the heart of the scandal; this is not just about homosexuality, but about the price we pay when we deny the rights and freedoms of others. Boise, U.S.A provides the kind of thought-provoking live entertainment not usually on offer in LA.

I say snap up your tickets now!