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Arts & Theatre

## Manes Studio Theatre's "A Few Good Men" Receives a Standing Ovation

By Cindi Sansone-Braff



Photo Courtesy Manes Studio Theatre of Long Island

Stellar performances by the cast and brilliant direction make Aaron Sorkin's "*A Few Good Men*" come to life at Manes Studio Theater in Lindenhurst.

May 18, 2025, an extraordinary theatrical experience awaits you at the newly renovated Manes Studio Theatre of Long Island. Under **Michael Blangiforti's** brilliant direction, the stellar cast of 16 delivered flawless performances in **Aaron Sorkin's** much acclaimed 1989 American legal drama. Sorkin was only 28 when his first play premiered on Broadway at the Music Box Theatre. The riveting plot of *A Few Good Men* revolves around a group of military lawyers assigned to defend two Marines for complicity in the death of a fellow unit member. This well-crafted two-act drama explores complex moral and ethical themes, such as personal responsibility, the importance of discovering the truth, the consequences of blindly following orders, misplaced loyalty, and good versus evil.

Ultimately, this gripping courtroom drama puts the entire military on trial, as a deeper conspiracy involving the irrefutable Marine code of honor and the corrupt, self-serving superior officers who justified their amoral behaviors in the name of God and country.

What makes this play and the 1992 movie adaptation directed by **Rob Reiner** and starring **Jack Nicholson, Tom Cruise, Demi Moore, Kevin Bacon,** and **Kiefer Sutherland** such a timeless classic is Sorkin's ability to create realistic, multifaceted characters whose motives, flaws, and imperfections are highly relatable and easily recognizable.

This play highlights the dramatic clash between Lt. Daniel A. Kaffee, an unenthusiastic military lawyer who is fulfilling his mandatory service, and Lt. Col. Nathan R. Jessep, a hardcore, hyper-judgmental, hypocritical military "lifer." These pivotal roles call for a dynamic duo of actors who can effectively execute the explosive climax, an emotionally charged courtroom showdown that resonates with audiences long after the curtain falls. **Chris Bias** as the protagonist, Kaffee, and **Thomas O'Donoghue** as the antagonist, Jessep, were perfectly cast in their respective roles. Although these two characters come to share a common goal of defending our country against the onslaught of evil, Kaffee does so by battling injustices in a court of law armed with well-chosen words and facts. Whereas Jessep, a man who has spent his entire adult life on battlefields and military bases, believes in the necessity of violence, weapons of mass destruction, and the Marine Corps Code of Conduct "Unit, Corp, God, Country," to ensure the survival of our American way of life.

At the beginning of the play, Kaffee half-heartedly does his job, operating on the law of minimum effort, seeking the quickest but not always the righteous resolution to his legal cases. The idea of justice being a moral obligation is totally foreign to him, even though his beloved deceased father was a renowned trial lawyer who died young defending the Constitution and himself against accusations of Communist affiliations. In the deepest part of Kaffee's being, he feels ill-equipped to follow in his father's legendary footsteps. Over the course of the play, with the help of Lt. Cmdr. Joanne Galloway, a highly intelligent, dedicated woman who works twice as hard as any man to succeed in a patriarchal world, Kaffee learns to believe in himself and becomes a staunch advocate for the inalienable right to due process of the law. **Kristin Hansen** gave an award-worthy performance as Galloway, delivering her lines with the right blend of exacting sarcasm and military stoicism. **Thom Harmon** was believable as the third lawyer assigned to the case, Lt. Sam Weinberg, a hardworking family man and friend of Kaffee. The easy banter between Weinberg, Galloway, and Kaffee provided much-needed comedic relief.

The actors who portrayed the two defendants, **Hunter Xavier Burrell** as Lance Cpl. Harold W. Dawson and **Randall Krauss** as Pfc. Loudon Downey were outstanding in their roles. These characters represent the overarching mindset among Marines to blindly follow orders and espouse the strong sense of brotherhood inherent in the belief, "Once a Marine, Always a Marine."



**Isaiah Castillo** delivered an emotion-packed performance as Pfc. Willian T. Santiago, the victim of a botched “Code Red,” an illegal, covert action used to discipline a Marine.

**Matt Fama** aced the role of the secondary protagonist in the play, 1st Lt. Jonathan James Kendrick, a self-righteous religious fanatic who claimed the only two books at his bedside were “The Marine Corps Code of Conduct and the King James Bible.”

**Steven J. Brennan** gave a powerful and gut-wrenching performance as Capt. Matthew A. Markinson, a devoted Marine officer suffering from PTSD. As the trial unfolds, Markinson becomes filled with guilt and disillusionment, and his shocking actions provide some of the most heartrending moments in the play.

**John Allan**, an Air Force veteran, a Retiree of the NYS Court System, and an impressive actor, used his life experiences and skills to ace the role of Capt. Julius Alexander Randolph, the judge who presides over the trial.

**Stefan Pallotta** as Capt. Jack Ross, **Blake Sheridan** as Cpl. Jeffrey Owen Howard, **Donn Weber** as Captain Isaac Whitaker, **Peter Krauss** as Cmdr. Walter Stone, **Ryan Katon-Donegal** as Lawyer/Cpl. Dunn/Sergeant at Arms, and **Michael Soumakis** as Tom/Orderly/ Cpl. Hammaker/M.P. all gave standout performances.

**Chrissy Van Syckle's** authentic military costume designs and **Danny Bishop's** transformative set, depicting various locations in Washington, D.C., and the United States Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, added to the show's overall success.

It took a great deal of courage and conviction on the part of **David Dubin**, **Rick Grossman**, and Blangiforti to take on the herculean task of producing a play that calls for a movie-sized cast and a multitude of quick scene changes. Their efforts were well-received by Saturday's opening night audience.

ADD YOUR JOB

"A well-performed theatrical piece should have audiences still thinking about it, reflecting, and talking about the next day and beyond," wrote Blangiforti in the program, explaining why they chose this play.

That was their goal, and they certainly achieved it with this unforgettable production.



*Entertaining, electrifying, and enlightening, Manes Studio Theatre's outstanding production of the beloved classic "A Few Good Men" is a must-see!*

*To purchase tickets, visit: [studiotheatrelongisland.thundertix.com](http://studiotheatrelongisland.thundertix.com), order by phone at 631-226-8400, or visit*

*Studio Theatre of L.I. Inc.,*

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*Content Warning: This show may not be appropriate for all audiences.*