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Experiencing the Courtroom Thrills 'n' Chills

With characters played close to perfection, The Stella Players recreated Agatha Christie's script *Witness for the Prosecution* on stage

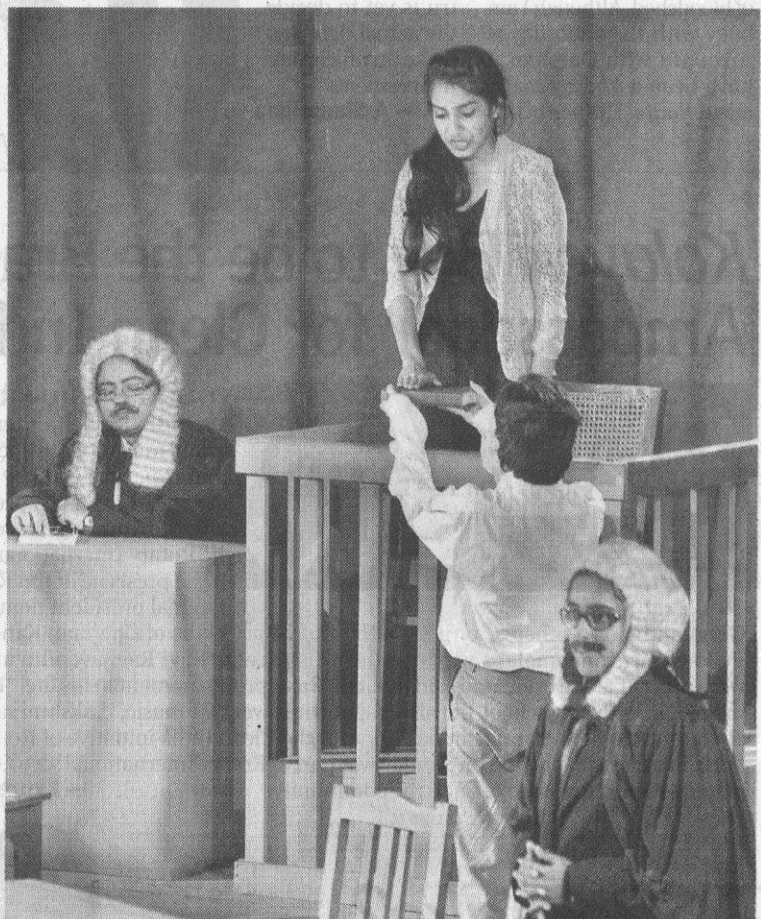
by Sonali Shenoy

When it's an Agatha Christie script, you know without thinking twice that it's going to be an exciting Sunday afternoon. Honestly though, we had her reservations about whether a college drama club would be able to do justice to it. But kudos to directors Nayantara Venkatesh and Priyanka Narahari, because The Stella Players of Stella Maris College were just short of brilliant. Humour, courtroom drama and unfolding of Christie's slow but deadly plot were all part of the mix at *Witness for the Prosecution*. Loud cheer followed the closing scene of the play, that was staged at the Museum Theatre over the weekend.

Organised in association with MY Theatre Festival and Crea-Shakthi, the story circles around a vulnerable Leonard Vole (Nidhi Punmia) who stands trial for the murder of his unlikely friend and beneficiary, the wealthy widow Emily French. With every bit of evidence pointing against him, his only alibi is his cold and calculating wife Romaine, who agrees to be a witness, not for the defence, but for the prosecution. Talk about spine chills right there!

Sir Wilfrid Roberts (Rochana Mohan), who was the lawyer for the defence, was perhaps the most popular actor in the cast by the end of the night, after a strong performance. Who knew listening to witnesses being cross questioned could give one such a rush? And beautiful, yet unfeeling wife Romaine Vole (Kavya Ramachandran) had us hooked from her first coy appearance on stage.

Of course the most unlikely of characters to win over the audience was Sir Wilfrid's secretary Greta (Ili Shohe) who was on stage very briefly. Smitten with their client for his good looks and as cute as a button — there was loud applause every



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time she made an appearance, insisting to the audience that he couldn't have done it, because he was just so...nice!

Pulling off a production where a majority of the characters were men, was also commendable by this all women cast. Except for the case of a disappearing moustache on one lawyer, mid show, the Stella Players

pulled off their well-practised mannerisms of the opposite sex with flair. The only thing we could have asked for was louder dialogue delivery in parts.

But at the end of play, the applause was so loud that it drowned out the cast introduction. And the twist before the lights went out hit us well and truly when we least expected it.