Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

George Clooney Stars as Edward R. Murrow

David Sheward · Wednesday, April 16th, 2025

The first thing you notice upon entering the Winter Garden Theater for *Good Night, and Good Luck,* the riveting new play headlined and co-written by George Clooney, is a bank of old-fashioned TV monitors on either side of the proscenium. As the drama enfolds, chronicling the uphill battle waged by fabled broadcaster Edward R. Murrow against the thuggish tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, TV images dominate Scott Pask's impressive gargantuan set recreating the 1954 CBS studios housed in Grand Central Station. Programming from the era runs on monitors placed all over the set and occasionally a huge screen descends from the flies, dwarfing the live actors. This constant barrage of video re-enforces the theme of the then-new medium being used as a weapon by McCarthy as a means of spreading his red-baiting lies and Murrow's attempt to use TV as an instrument for education and enlightenment. The play by Clooney and Grant Heslov, based on their screenplay for the 2005 film, is a searing and chilling portrait of power run amok and the need for a free press to stop it.

Glenn Fleshler and George Clooney in *Good Night, and Good Luck.*

Credit: Emilio Madrid

In 1954, McCarthy was at the heights of his tyrannical popularity. Employing the fear of communism and the threat of nuclear destruction from the Soviets, McCarthy harassed and persecuted anyone whose leftist leanings he didn't like. Murrow challenged McCarthy on his trailblazing news program *See It Now*, which took the revolutionary step of adding commentary to its reportage. *Good Night, and Good Luck*, Murrow's signature sign-off phrase, chronicles the behind-the-scenes drama of those broadcasts, Murrow's conflicts with network president William S. Paley who wants to play it safe, and the blacklisting dangers faced by Murrow's staff.

George Clooney in *Good Night, and Good Luck.*
Credit: Emilio Madrid

Director David Cromer marshalls Pask's intricate, mobile set, Heather Gilbert's versatile lighting, David Bengali's vibrant projection design, and a small army of actors to create an almost cinematic narrative effectively combining live action and video images. The 1950s atmosphere is perfectly achieved through Brenda Abbandandolo's period costumes and attention to details, such as the constant smoking (by the end of the play's 100 minutes, I felt as if I'd smoked an entire pack of cigarettes.) Much of Clooney and Heslov's script employs Murrow's stirring speeches and excerpts from *See It Now*. Cromer has the giant screen project Clooney as Murrow in real time while the

actor is reading the anti-McCarthy declarations in a corner of the set. Thus, we get the intimacy of Clooney's subtle yet forceful performance and an idea of the huge impact TV had on the American psyche.

Clooney forgoes movie-star histrionics for a graceful, understated portrait, not stooping to an imitation of Murrow, but approximating his clipped speech. He conveys Murrow's quiet integrity, never rising his voice, in clashes with the pragmatic Paley (a smooth Paul Gross) whose priority is avoiding any controversy and pleasing the sponsor (in the 1950s large corporations would foot the bill for individual programs and expected their interests to be paramount). Clooney is best at the top and the end of the play, delivering a Murrow speech pleading for TV to be more than just a means of entertainment. He is simple, direct and powerful. The evening ends with a devastating montage of video clips from Milton Berle to Elon Musk, showing that Murrow's plea went unheeded.

George Clooney and Clark Gregg in *Good Night, and Good Luck.*
Credit: Emilio Madrid

Clark Gregg and Fran Kranz give quiet dignified performances as two CBS staffers who fall victim to McCarthy's brutal threats. Glenn Fleshler is solidly supportive as Fred Friendly, head of the news department. Carter Hudson and Ilana Glazer make the most of a somewhat distracting subplot as CBS co-workers secretly married in defiance of company policy.

Good Night, and Good Luck is a taut, absorbing reminder of a dark time in our recent past and an intensely relevant indictment of complacency as Trump replaces McCarthy as America's demagogic demon.

April 3—June 8. Winter Garden Theater, 1634 Broadway, NYC. Running time: 100 minutes with no intermission. telecharge.com

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