



## REVIEW: The 39 Steps

By ASHLEY GOODFELLOW

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If you string together a series of small comedic triumphs, layer them on top of a suspenseful plot, turn it on high-speed and add a dash of romance, what you get is Alfred Hitchcock with a twist of Monty Python.

This is the Rose Theatre's Summer Theatre Season presentation of *The 39 Steps* (a play adapted from the 1915 novel by John Buchan and the 1935 film by Alfred Hitchcock)— a comic-mystery that takes the audience on a fast-paced romp as one man tries to uncover a spy-ring and finds himself in one precarious (and hilarious) situation after another.

Meet Englishman Richard Hannay (played by the noteworthy Mark Llewellyn). He's a handsome 37-ish year-old bachelor with an attractive pencil moustache who tries an evening at the theatre as an antidote to his boredom— and it works.

While there he meets a woman, hears a gunshot, and winds up at home with a dead spy on his lap and her secrets in his hand. And there, the fun only begins— with only a clue from the dead spy, it's now up to Hannay to save Britain, prove his innocence and expose a mysterious organization, The 39 Steps. His four-day on-the-run adventure offers just enough of a whodunit plot to keep you invested, but not so much that it feels heavy or arduous— and with the non-stop comedy coming from the continuous flow of characters and surprises, the laughs are played right to the audience. And each surprise is better than the last. Llewellyn has just the right look for the part. He gives Hannay the perfect mixture of charming and suave— the flirtatious raising of the eyebrows, his breezy body language — so right from the get-go he has the audience rooting for him.

Three other actors (Sweeney MacArthur, Scott Carmichael and Erin MacKinnon) work relentlessly to master multiple roles— sometimes switching character at break-neck speed— and the result brings about a riotous, vaudeville-style farce. The audience is never left out of the loop as the show races along with sometimes six or seven characters on stage at once, and there's barely time to finish one laugh before moving on to the next. Characters slip in and out of roles so fast even they can't keep up at times— which fuels the hysterical exaggerations that are displayed for the audience's benefit. It's an ambitious play for that reason alone, but the cast and crew— and more specifically director Robert Woodcock— pull it off flawlessly.

What also gives it credibility as a clever spoof is the use of the versatile— and quite minimalistic— set. Lamp posts, window frames and other elements are used as set pieces and props, and give the play an artfully amusing element. One scene in particular uses a screen, a spotlight and cut-outs to fashion a police chase, and it is as smart and unexpected as it is funny.

*The 39 Steps* is two hours of sheer madness— and it's obvious early on why this is a two-time Tony Award winner and a Drama Desk Award winner.

And, you don't have to be a die-hard fan of Hitchcock— or even spy stories— to enjoy this enlightening piece of theatre. You just have to enjoy a good laugh.

*The 39 Steps* runs until July 30 in the Studio at the Rose Theatre. For tickets and information visit [www.rosetheatre.ca](http://www.rosetheatre.ca) or call 905-874-2800.



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