

WELCOME

Welcome to this production of The 39 Steps in this magnificent theatre. You are about to see one of the most hilarious adaptations of a classic film performed by just 4 actors playing well over 50 different parts.

John Buchan wrote the spy novel 'The 39 Steps' in 1915 and since then there have been many cinematic and theatrical adaptations of the novel but none of them bare much resemblance to Buchan's original 1915 text and plot. Perhaps the most famous of these adaptations is the 1935 Alfred Hitchcock film starring Robert Donat as Richard Hannay. In this film Hitchcock completely reworked the novel keeping only the central character and the Scottish setting. It was Hitchcock's classic film version rather than Buchan's novel that people seem to consider the definitive version of 'The 39 Steps'. It was indeed Hitchcock's film rather than Buchan's book that Patrick Barlow decided to adapt for the stage in 2005 and this is the version we are presenting.

Patrick Barlow's adaptation of the film was first performed at The West Yorkshire Playhouse on 17th June 2005, it then transferred to The Tricycle Theatre, London in August 2005 and subsequently transferred to The Criterion Theatre in London's West End on 14th September 2006 where it is still running today and will close on Saturday September 5th just shy of its 9th West End anniversary. It won an Olivier award in 2007 for Best New Comedy; it also has 2 Tony Awards and won the Drama Desk Award in the category of Unique Theatrical Experience. It played on Broadway for 2-years and there was even a Spanish adaption produced that ran in Madrid in 2008.

The play, although very different from the style of Hitchcock's film, still features every scene from the classic movie. The dialogue too is lifted almost word for word from Hitchcock's masterpiece. So although the play is very different it is still firmly rooted in the 1935 film. In spite of all the farcical elements, there is a very good story at work. Hannay is the quintessential Englishman who completely by accident finds himself embroiled in the work of a sinister spy ring and only he can save the day. It is Hannay's sense of responsibility, patriotism and morality that makes him our admirable but unlikely hero. The Hitchcock film really did define a whole genre of subsequent films about the innocent man on the run trying to get to the truth whilst avoiding being caught. Indeed this became a defining stylistic feature of later Hitchcock films. Whilst solving the mystery Hannay also finds love and it is through love that Hannay finds his reason to live. This is definitely a voyage of discovery for our hero.

The real beauty of this piece is its simplicity. It was never intended to be a grand large scale production and its charm and indeed much of the comedy comes from the fact that everything is minimal. Just four actors with limited props and scenery in a short time frame. Yes it could be scaled up with grand sets and special effects – as seems to be the fashion in modern theatre – but this would take away the heart of the piece. It was never intended to be any more than it is here and we are proud to have kept it simple.

The 39 Steps really is a unique theatrical experience and we do hope you enjoy it.

THE NORTHERN COMEDY THEATRE



CODE39

