

'39 Steps' and 3,000 Laughs

Written by Editor

Tuesday, 15 February 2011 13:49



"Alfred Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*" goes from thriller to hilarious thrill ride in Broadway's remake of this Hollywood movie classic at the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina this month.

Based on a slightly altered version of the 1935 suspense film, the play transforms Hitchcock's tale of intrigue into a Tony Award-winning comedy that moves at breakneck speed. The show runs through Feb. 27th.

"The show is just a blast," said director Russell Treyz, whose Arts Center credits include last February's hit comedy "Boeing-Boeing," as well as "The Odd Couple," "South Pacific" and "The Buddy Holly Story." "The improvisational feel of the show is what makes it so much fun."

If that weren't challenge enough, the cast has only a few remnant furnishings and a handful of

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props to recreate the movie, shot for shot. And there lies the genius of this little comic gem that nabbed an Olivier Award for Best Comedy and a Tony for Best Play.

It takes madcap staging to pack all of the film's action — the murders, shootings, train chases and plane crashes — into a purposely open set. But the strategy works to the delight of audiences who derive maximum pleasure from the show's minimalistic trappings.

Hitchcock's first entry into the romantic thriller genre, "The 39 Steps" revolves around Richard Hannay, a debonair English gent, bored to tears with his London life and ready for a little adventure. His wish comes true when he discovers a foreign enemy spy ring is trying to smuggle scientific-military secrets out of Britain. Pulled into the plot by a vexing theater patron he happens to sit next to at a West End show, the initially reluctant-turned-relentless Hannay sets out to stop the bad guys single-handedly while being pursued by police, who wrongly suspect him of murder.

The chase takes audiences and their imaginations from a London flat to the Scottish moors on an Edinburgh-bound train that at first glance appears like nothing more than a few well-worn chairs. Before long, the eclectic furniture has magically morphed into a speeding train car.

"The characters go from high brow to low brow, from menacing to comic," Treyz said. "They're all over the place."

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The play stars a familiar face to Arts Center audiences. Gary Lindemann plays Richard, returning to the Hilton Head stage after starring in October's "Man of LaMancha." Rick Ford and Ethan Paulini play two of the bad guys. Arts Center newcomer Kathryn Merry plays the romantic interest.

"Audiences all over the world have loved it," Treyz said, pointing out that the New York Post called "39 Steps," "The most entertaining show on Broadway."

"It's been a big hit everywhere it's played," Treyz added.

Tickets are \$31 for kids and \$44 for adults. Group rates and three-show subscription packages offering discounted tickets to "The 39 Steps" and the remaining Arts Center Theater Series are available as well. Call 843-842-ARTS or visit www.artshhi.com for details.

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