

The 39 Steps is a unique, wacky fast-paced theatre experience

East Side Players production on stage until Nov. 8

Beach Mirror

By Angeline Mair

If you want to see the most unique and spectacularly wacky theatre production ever, you must see East Side Players opening show of the season, The 39 Steps.

Written by Patrick Barlow, this show's plot seems like a typical spy-thriller, but it's how the story is told that makes it stand out. Based on the 1935 Alfred Hitchcock movie, the show's style is Indiana Jones meets Charlie Chaplin.

Set in London, England, and Scotland in 1935, the show begins with Richard Hannay (Stephen Carrette) lamenting how boring his life is, so he decides to go to the theatre. There he meets an English agent named Annabella (Kristie Paille), who asks to hide at his apartment because two spies are after her.

He doesn't exactly believe her until later when she stumbles toward him with a knife in her back. Before she dies, she explains there is an international security secret threatening to put Britain in danger and he must stop the agents who are planning to do so. This means he must find a man with half a finger, the 39 Steps and a house in Scotland.

So before the cops come to arrest him for murder, Richard goes on the run and decides to go to Scotland to fulfill Annabella's dying wish while trying to clear his name.

He meets a colourful cast of characters along the way, all played by two actor – called Clown 1 and 2 (Daryn DeWalt, Jacob Hogan) who, combined, play about 150 characters. This accomplished by several costume and prop changes that is dizzying to keep up with.

The quest takes Richard through several settings including a train, a cottage, the Scottish countryside, several homes and a sheriff's office, to name a few. Characters the clowns play include policemen, veterans, spies, bagpipe players, wives and more.

Paille also plays Pamela, who ends up unwillingly helping Richard on his quest, and Margaret, the wife of one of the many characters Richard meets along the way.

This is a hilarious, satirical, fast-paced adventure story, and to watch the action and these two actors change costumes and characters so quickly (sometimes they are three roles in a single scene) is nothing short of amazing. It's also something that provides constant humour throughout, and keeps the audience laughing at their quick, role-changing shenanigans.

Adding to DeWalt's and Hogan's obvious talents is Carrette's portrayal of man-on-the-run, Richard. There are so many moments of absurd and silly sprinkled throughout what would be serious if this were not a comedy, and he never cracks, playing his role with humour and dedication, while being a likeable character.

Paille does not disappoint, especially as the beautiful Pamela, who meets Richard on the train, outs him to the police, but then finds herself handcuffed and having to help the could-be murderer. She is funny and sweet and adds a nice side love story to this chaotic, crazy mess.

There is a lot of creative use of props and effects in this show, and so, with some simple rolling wooden blocks, curtains and intense physical exertion by the four actors, we are transported into different scenes that include bagpipers in a parade, a herd of sheep, even airplanes overhead.

This is truly a show you have to see to believe. If you are looking for a unique and funny theatre production, this is most definitely it.

The 39 Steps runs until Nov. 8 at 8 p.m., at The Papermill Theatre at Todmorden, 67 Pottery Rd. Tickets are \$22 and be purchased by calling 416-425-0917 or by visiting www.eastsideplayers.ca