

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

Presents

A Thriller Farce

THE 39 STEPS

Adapted by Patrick Barlow

From the novel by John Buchan

From the movie by Alfred Hitchcock

Licensed by ITV Global Entertainment Limited

And an original concept by Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon

STUDY GUIDE

Premiere 18 November

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 15, 16 and 17 November

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours and Sunday at 14.30 Hours

Matinee Performances weekly either on Wednesday or Friday at 11.30 Hours

The English Theatre of Hamburg

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The English Theatre will premiere the popular thriller farce **THE 39 STEPS** on 18 November, 2021, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 15, 16 and 17 November. You can use the cover of this publication to advertise the play in your school or workplace. The text of the play may be obtained at www.amazon.com. Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play on 14 November at 19:30 should contact marketing@englishtheatre.de.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT:

Patrick Barlow was born on 18 March, 1947 in Leicester, England. He is well known in the UK for his two man comedy team called “The National Theatre of Brent.” Barlow and another actor did parodies on plays, playing all the parts, and they performed in various venues, on television and radio. The group’s name may be misleading to those who do not live in the UK. It is meant to be ironic because there is no actual national theatre in Brent. The two men won two Sony Bold Awards, a Premier Ondas Award for Best European Comedy and the New York Festival Gold Award for Best Comedy. Barlow wrote the highly popular stage adaptation of **THE 39 STEPS** which premiered in June 2005 at the West Yorkshire Playhouse and was later produced at the Criterion Theatre in London. The play was originally adapted from the 1915 novel by John Buchan and made into a film in 1935 by Alfred Hitchcock. After the film was produced, a stage adaptation with four actors was written by Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon. Patrick Barlow’s is the latest version which played successfully at the Criterion and closed after nine years, making it the fifth longest running play in West End history. **THE 39 STEPS** won Barlow an Olivier Award for Best New Comedy in the UK while his Broadway adaptation co-won the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience and was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play. Other plays written by Barlow include **THE WONDER OF SEX, LOVE UPON THE THRONE, and THE MESSIAH**. He has written numerous screenplays and appeared in many films including **SHAKE-SPEARE IN LOVE** and **BRIDGET JONES’S DIARY**.

ABOUT THE PLAY:

THE 39 STEPS features just four actors who play 150 zany characters in 100 minutes of fast-paced fun. The plot has many twists and turns. Richard Hannay meets Annabella Schmidt who says she is in danger of being killed by a criminal gang called “The 39 Steps”. Richard hides her in his London flat where she shares with him that she knows of top secret information that threatens national security. She tells him she must meet someone in Scotland or there will be dire consequences. When Annabella is mysteriously murdered, Richard is falsely suspected of killing her. Pursued by both the police and the criminal gang that Annabella feared, Richard goes on the run while simultaneously trying to prove his innocence. On his way to Scotland to carry out Annabella’s wishes he meets the beautiful Pamela who tries to turn him over to the police on two different occasions, but Richard repeatedly manages to escape from the law. Eventually the top secret information is discovered in an unlikely place, and Pamela finally realizes that Richard has been telling her the truth all along. She helps him prove his innocence. The spy gang is prevented from obtaining the top secret information and after all they have experienced together Richard and Pamela fall in love.

Summary of THE 39 STEPS

Act I

London, 1935. Richard Hannay, an attractive man in his 30s, is bored with his life. He decides to pull himself together and go to a Music Hall for some entertainment. There he watches a performance by “Mr Memory”, a man with a photographic memory. The performer is able to answer correctly every question he is asked by the audience, such as “Who won the Cup in 1926?”

During the performance, Annabella Schmidt, a stranger to Hannay, sits down next to him. She sees two men in the audience who have been following her and want to kill her. To distract them, she pulls a gun out of her handbag and fires it into the air. Everyone in the audience panics. In the pandemonium that follows, Pamela and Hannay manage to make their way out of the theatre. On the street outside she begs Hannay to take her to his place where she will be safe.

Once they are in Hannay’s flat, Annabella tells him that she is a spy and is being pursued by a secret agent of a foreign power. The agent wants her killed because she discovered his plot to steal highly confidential secrets from the British military. He is the head of a criminal spy gang known as “The 39 Steps”. It is said that a part of the little finger on his right hand is missing. Annabella warns Hannay that the agent is extremely dangerous and should be avoided at all cost.

She asks Hannay for a map of Scotland. It is vital, she tells him, that she talk to a man there before the top secret information gets out of the country. The man, she says, lives in a big house called Alt-na-shellach. Hannay gives her the map she needs and agrees to let her spend the night in his flat.

That night, Annablla is murdered in her sleep, presumably by the spies who were chasing her. Hannay realizes that he himself is in danger now.

The criminal gang knows that he came to Annabella’s rescue and possibly assumes that he is a part of her mission. Besides that, the police will surely suspect him of murdering Annabella when her body is found within his walls. He quickly leaves his flat with the map in hand and takes a train to Scotland. There he hopes to find the man that Annabella desperately needed to talk to.

Soon after he gets on the train, he sees policemen moving from car to car searching for someone. He ducks into a compartment occupied by a pretty young woman named Pamela. To prevent the police from recognizing him, he turns his back to them and kisses Pamela long and passionately. When the police move on, he tries to persuade her that he is innocent of any crime, but she does not believe him. She pushes him away and rushes from the compartment to report him to the police. In danger of being arrested, Hannay jumps from the train and flees on foot.

In Scotland he comes upon an old farmer named Crofter. Hannay asks him if there are any big houses in the area. Crofter replies that there is one called Alt-na-shellach that belongs to a Professor Jordan, but that it is too far away to get there in the dark and the bad weather. He offers to put Hannay up for the night for a small fee. As Crofter’s young wife Margaret prepares supper for them, Hannay discovers a photo of himself in the day’s newspaper along with an article claiming that he is the murderer of Annabella. He hides the newspaper but not before Margaret also sees the photo. Later, after Crofter leaves the house to lock the barn, Hannay tells Margaret his story, which she wants to believe. He is obviously the sort of attractive, exciting young man that she has always dreamed of. When the police arrive at midnight searching for Hannay, Margaret helps him slip out of the house safely, giving him the farmer’s heavy coat to protect him from the cold weather. Hannay notices that there is a hymn book in the breast pocket of the coat.

On the run from the police, Hannay finds the house called Alt-na-shellach. There he meets Professor Jordan whom he thinks he can trust. He reveals to Jordan that Annabella Schmidt wanted to visit him regarding some secret information and an organization called “The 39 Steps”. When Hannay sees that part of Jordan’s little finger is missing, he remembers Annabella’s warning that such a man is head of “The 39 Steps” and therefore extremely dangerous. Jordan notices that Hannay has spotted his finger. He admits that he is not the respectable citizen he seems to be and that he is about to convey some vital information out of the country. He would prefer that Hannay join him and become part of the “master race”. When Hannay rejects the offer, Jordan shoots him. He then leaves the house believing Hannay is dead. But Hannay has only pretended to die. Fortunately, Jordan’s bullet hit the thick hymn book in the breast pocket of the coat that the farmer’s wife gave to him.

Act II

Hannay escapes from Alt-na-shellach and goes to the sherrif’s office where he reports that Jordan tried to kill him. What he does not know is that the sherrif is one of Jordan’s best friends. The sherrif calls in an inspector to handcuff Hannay, but he can get a handcuff only on one of Hannay’s wrists before Hannay jumps through a window and escapes once again. He runs through the streets and ducks into an assembly hall where a political campaign rally is going on.

To his surprise, Hannay is taken for one of the evening’s speakers. He improvises a speech and answers questions from a cheering audience. Pamela, the pretty young woman he kissed on the train, turns up at the rally. She again reports him to the police, unaware that they are actually cohorts of Professor Jordan. The “police” handcuff Pamela to Hannay. The two manage to flee, however, with Hannay dragging Pamela along behind him.

After trudging through the rough Scottish landscape, Hannay and Pamela decide to get out of the wind and cold by finding shelter somewhere.

They come upon the McGarrigle Hotel. So as not to arouse suspicion, they conceal their cuffed hands in their coats. The owners of the hotel, Mr and Mrs McGarrigle, say they have only a room with one bed available. After Hannay and Pamela claim to be a married couple, the prudish Garrigles allow them to register. That night, while Hannay is asleep beside her, Pamela is able to get her hand out of the cuff and leave the room. In the hotel lobby she sees one of the men who earlier had posed as a policeman and arrested her and Hannay. The man is speaking on the phone to another of Jordan’s cohorts. After listening to the conversation, Pamela realizes that Hannay has been telling her the truth all along. He really is innocent of any crime. She returns to the room and tells Hannay the man on the phone said something about “The 39 Steps” and a plan to pick someone up at the London Palladium. Hannay decides they must go there to find out what is going on. He thinks it may be the only way to clear himself of the murder charges. In spite of all their problems, he and Pamela are starting to grow fond of each other.

At the Palladium, they see Professor Jordan watching “Mr Memory” demonstrate his amazing mental powers. It occurs to Hannay that the performer with his photographic memory might have memorized the contents of the stolen documents that Annablla told him about. Knowing that “Mr Memory” always gives honest answers to questions from the audience, Hannay asks the entertainer what is meant by “The 39 Steps”? As expected, “Mr Memory” replies correctly that “The 39 Steps” is the name of a foreign spy ring.

When Jordan hears this, he is enraged. He pulls a gun from his pocket and shoots “Mr Memory”. The police immediately arrest Jordan. “Mr Memory” is fading fast. Before he dies, however, he reveals word for word the contents of the stolen documents, ie. the confidential information that Jordan and his gang wished to smuggle out of the country. It involved the secret formula for a silent military airplane. Jordan’s devilish plot has been revealed and thwarted. All charges against Hannay are dropped. He and Pamela,

unsure about the future of their relationship, part. A little later, however, she shows up unexpectedly at his flat. It is now clear that they have fallen madly in love.

CURTAIN

Study Questions

1. Why does Hannah go to the Music Hall?
2. Who does he see performing there?
3. Who does Hannah hide in his flat?
4. What is Annabella's profession?
5. What is "The 39 Steps?"
6. Who is its leader?
7. Who is murdered in Hannah's flat?
8. Where does Hannah meet and kiss Pamela?
9. Why does he kiss her?
10. By what physical characteristic can Professor Jordan be identified?

Answer Key:

1. For some entertainment. 2. "Mr Memory". 3. Annabella. 4. She is a spy. 5. A foreign criminal spy ring. 6. Professor Jordan. 7. Annabella. 8. On the train to Scotland. 9. To prevent the police from recognizing him. 10. A part of his little finger is missing.

Interpretative Exercise

1. Describe what Professor Jordan and his organization "The 39 Steps" are plotting to do.
2. What are some of the dangers that Hannah and Pamela encounter and escape from?
3. How is "Mr Memory" instrumental in thwarting Professor Jordan's plan?