

Arts & Style



Take steps this spring to prevent crabgrass from taking over your lawn. See story on p. 24.

Enjoy belly laughs at Hitchcock parody

By Julinda D. Lewis

Try this recipe: Take 3 parts Alfred Hitchcock thriller, stir in 1 part Monty Python and mix well. Half-bake at a high temperature for 1 hour 45 minutes. Yields: Patrick Barlow's theatrical spoof, *The 39 Steps*, now onstage at Hanover Tavern. Serves: 150 hysterically laughing theater patrons.

The play is a parody of the 1935 Hitchcock movie of that name, a murder mystery, which in turn is based on John Buchan's 1915 thriller by the same name.

But where the typically suspenseful Hitchcock black-and-white film seems slow-moving by today's standards, Barlow's stage play is fast-paced and colorful.

"Funny" and "hilarious" were among the words I heard between bursts of belly-

holding laughter from the audience.

Barlow's 2005 adaptation of the original concept by Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon is played strictly for laughs. Four actors play more than 150 characters — sometimes simultaneously — interchanging hats, props and accents.

The hero of the show is Alec Beard, making his Virginia Rep debut as Richard

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Paul Major, Audra Honaker, Irene Kuykendall and Alec Beard play 150 characters in the Tony Award-winning play *The 39 Steps*, a parody of Alfred Hitchcock movies, which runs at the Rep's Hanover Tavern through March 29.



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39 Steps

From page 23

Hannay. Wrongfully accused of murder, this Canadian living in London sets off on a zany adventure involving a train ride to Scotland to prove his innocence. En route, he gets caught up in a nebulous conspiracy involving British military secrets.

Beard is the only actor to play just one role, and the part of Hannay seems tailor-made for him. He has the handsome face and stature of a leading man, but easily segues in and out of comedic elements.

Similarly, Irene Kuykendall is the Woman — actually, she plays the three glamorous women in Hannay's madcap life: the sultry and mysterious Annabella Schmidt; Pamela, his unwilling accomplice; and finally Margaret, the oppressed wife of a rigid Scottish farmer. These three characters are so different, it's possible to forget that they are all played by Kuykendall.

Multiplicitous characters

The other characters — the maid, milkman, policemen, professor, professor's wife, sheriff, farmer, train passengers, people at a political rally, a baby and more — are played by Paul S. Major (Clown 1) and

Audra Honaker (Clown 2). Sometimes they even play inanimate objects, as when Major appears as a Christmas tree.

Major and Honaker, both of whom have a proven track record in comedic roles, are responsible for the majority of the hilarity and hijinks. In an early scene in which Hannay goes to the theater to assuage his boredom, Honaker, as Mr. Memory, delivers an impressive, fast-paced recitation of trivia.

That scene includes some inside humor: In considering where to spend his evening, Hannay first considers and then dismisses a trip to the Altria Theater to see *Cats*.

There are also numerous references to Hitchcock movies, including several escapes through a window frame (*Rear Window*), several railcar scenes (*Strangers on a Train*) and explicit directions (*North by Northwest*).

Other favorites among the evening's many shenanigans include the construction of an automobile and an absolutely ingenious plane crash.

Second act slow-down

With all the non-stop action and laughter, it came as a bit of a surprise that the second act seemed to wane and lose momentum. I'm not sure whether this was

due to the script, or if the director started to run out of steam. One can hardly blame anyone for needing to catch a breath by the middle of the second act.

With this play, Nathaniel Shaw, Virginia Rep's artistic director, makes his directorial debut at Hanover Tavern. This is quite a different pace and space than his previous Virginia Rep directing credits for *Once*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *West Side Story*, all at the November Theatre.

The design team for *The 39 Steps* includes Ruth Hedberg's attractive period costumes and Terrie Powers' simple, functional scenic design, consisting primarily of an armchair, table, doorframe, window frame and some boxes that do double and triple duty as seats, storage and anything else needed.

A special nod to the hardworking stage crew who, instead of remaining in the background, hold up signs (Applause, Bang!), deliver props and make scene changes with premeditated humor.

The whole kit and kaboodle is supported by Derek Dumais' sound design and some effective lighting by BJ Wilkinson.

Espionage, adventure, romance, a dashing leading man, beautiful and mysterious leading ladies, and a powerhouse cast

committed to delivering physical humor and plenty of laughs all add up to a winning formula. The audience was still laughing on the way to the parking lot.

The 39 Steps runs through March 29, with evening performances at 8 p.m. every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and some Wednesdays, and matinee performances at 2 p.m. on Sundays and select Wednesdays and Saturdays.

See it at Virginia Rep's Barksdale Season at Hanover Tavern, 13181 Hanover Courthouse Rd., Hanover, Virginia 23069. Admission is \$44. For tickets, go to virginiairep.org or call (804) 282-2620.

Julinda D. Lewis is a dancer, teacher and writer who was born 50+ years ago in Brooklyn, N.Y., and currently resides in Eastern Henrico County.

FROM PAGE 26 ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD

MATTE	ATOM	HOB	O
BRAUN	SARA	OWED	
AKING	ISRE	NOWNED	
	ALT	POOR	UPS
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ABSURD	AND	ABSURD	
LOTS	OVER	LANAI	
EXER	NYET	ERODE	

Gardening

From page 24

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also may be suitable.

Lela Martin is a Master Gardener with the Chesterfield County office of the Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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