



Review: DCTC Presents 'The 39 Steps'

by Greg Rice



When you walk into the Ricketson Theater at the DCTC you are greeted with one of the more inventive "show curtains" I have seen. The "curtain"

is a movie screen showing old newsreels from the 1930's, setting the mood for the evening. As the lights go down Mr. Hitchcock "himself" asks you to turn your cell phones off and finish unwrapping your candy.

We then meet [Richard Hannay](#) (Sam Gregory) who is bored and tired of life. So he decides to go to a movie. Well the next thing we know, he is part of the movie and attending a performance of Mr. Memory where the evening's non-stop [Patrick Barlow](#) adaptation of "**The 39 Steps**" takes off.

With all parts played by just 4 actors, a few dozen by two (Larry Paulsen and [Rob Nagle](#)), the play tells the story of Mr. Hannay's accidental involvement with a spy, Anabella Schmidt, who returns to his flat and is murdered there overnight. Hannay is accused of the murder and sets out to find out who murdered her and what "The 39 Steps" are equipped with the bit of information she left behind. What happens next is a lightning speed chase across the country to solve the mystery where Hannay is thrown into many tight situations in many locations with many characters.

"The 39 Steps" recreates the movie but turns it into a comedy with a number of references to [Alfred Hitchcock's](#) other movies. With no real sets, props

and "special effects" are moved on to and off of the stage by the four actors. (The train sequence alone is worth the price of admission.) You will also notice that the entire show looks like a black & white movie. This is achieved by the wonderful work of Costume Designer David Kay Mickelsen, Scenic Designer [Michael C. Smith](#) and Lighting Designer Charles R. MacLeod. Extremely key to the production is the Sound Design done perfectly by Sound Designer William Burns. All of this is directed nicely by [Art Manke](#). A show like this could fall apart without crisp direction and Mr. Manke keeps the action crisp and moving quite smoothly. The only time the show seems to lose a bit of steam is in the opening sequence of Act II. However, there is a nice bit involving a red velvet rope in the sequence that if the actors aren't careful could have them a bit tangled up. After this, the show picks that steam back up and races breathlessly to the end where we, of course, find out what the "39 Steps" are. That may be the one flaw I found. The revelation really isn't a "revelation". You are too

busy laughing to catch all of it. But you know that the mystery is solved and everything turns out fine in the end. More beautiful than you expect.

The cast pulls all of this off without passing out! Rounding out the cast is Victoria Mack who plays three of the women Mr. Hannay encounters, the most fun being Anabella Schmidt, the woman who triggers all of the action. Sam Gregory, the only actor who only plays one character, once again gives a memorable performance. Together Mr. Paulsen and Mr. Nagle portray a few dozen characters, some that will have you rolling in the aisles, most notably the inn keepers and the female roles that Mr. Paulsen plays.

If you are a Hitchcock fan, you will love this play. If you aren't, you will love this play. Part of the fun is picking out the references to other Hitchcock movies which are cleverly incorporated into the show with, for me, the exception of one.

A fun start to the DCTC's season. Perfect for the intimate Ricketson Theater and Clocking in at about an hour and 45 minutes with one 15 minute intermission, to catch your breath, you will have a smile as you ascend the steps from the theater. (Has anyone counted them?!)

"The 39 Steps" is currently playing at The Ricketson Theater at the DCTC in the Denver Center for the Performing arts. For tickets and showtimes call the box office or go to www.denvercenter.org. \$10.00 student rush tickets are available an hour before the performance with a valid student ID.