

**GREAT
LAKES
THEATER**

TEACHER PREPARATION
GUIDE

The 39 Steps

Adapted by PATRICK BARLOW
From the novel by JOHN BUCHAN
From the movie by ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Directed by JACLYN MILLER

GENEROUS SUPPORT PROVIDED BY

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Spring 2022

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production of *The 39 Steps*, adapted by Patrick Barlow which will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from April 29—May 22, 2022.

Mix a Hitchcock masterpiece with a juicy spy novel, add a dash of Monty Python and you have this fast-paced, madcap whodunit for anyone who loves the magic of theater! This two-time Tony and Drama Desk Award-winning treat is packed with nonstop laughs, over 150 zany characters (played by a ridiculously talented cast of four), an onstage plane crash, handcuffs, missing fingers, and some good old-fashioned romance!

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *The 39 Steps*. We offer special thanks to arts educator Kelly Elliott for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly Schaffer Florian".

Kelly Schaffer Florian
Director of Educational Services
Kflorian@greatlakestheater.org

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Hansen".

David Hansen
Education Outreach Associate
dhansen@greatlakestheater.org



A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER

You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc., be completely powered off once you have entered the theatre. Even the glow from a watch or a silent cell phone (used for checking the time, text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as our own camera and editor, choosing our own personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there may be design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE



Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre.

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square its home. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE



The 39 Steps marked the introduction of character Richard Hannay in a four-part, thriller book series penned by John Buchan in 1915. It has been considered the “progenitor of the modern spy novel” — and Buchan, the composer of this classic formula: take a seemingly ordinary human, draw them into a mystery they vaguely understand, give them an assignment to carry out; put roadblocks at every turn, take away the ability to seek help from authoritative figures or organizations, do not allow them to know who they can trust — and make sure time is of the essence.

The novel was written and published during World War I. It's chock-full of references to an impending war, social and religious politics and antisemitism. Roughly two decades later, Alfred Hitchcock optioned the rights for this ground-breaking book and adapted it into a screenplay. The film was released in 1935, the same year the Nuremberg Laws passed. World War II was on the horizon — and the social/religious politics of this work were as prevalent as ever. Although the underlying plot stayed the same, Hitchcock modified and generalized major plot points — namely the ending — to make the piece more fitting for current circumstances. But true to himself and the original intent, he plays on the

psychological fears which are two-fold: an innocent person accused of a crime that must be solved to clear one's name, and what happens if this vital information makes its way into the enemy's hands.

Another fact: Hitchcock's team was responsible for the creation of Hannay's love interest, Pamela — a character that has been retained through many subsequent adaptations including Patrick Barlow's four-person stage extravaganza that you are here to witness! What I love about these facts is that they exemplify how art is always evolving to suit the medium, era, and ultimately, the story.

Barlow's adaptation takes this beloved, stylistic film and infuses it with inherent theatricality by putting it in the hands of four actors. Four actors. To recreate an entire film. This requires incredible resourcefulness, ingenuity, alacrity and **ENDURANCE**.

SUMMARY

In this fast-paced, madcap comedy, four people take on the near impossible — to recreate the film of *The 39 Steps*. Richard Hannay, a returning visitor to London who's altogether bored with his life, has a chance encounter with a secret agent — Annabella Schmidt. Annabella entrusts Hannay with highly sensitive, confidential information, knowing that her life is in grave danger. After she's murdered — at his flat no less! — Hannay is the assumed suspect and must go on the run to unravel the clues of this spy thriller in order to protect national security and clear his name.



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Richard Hannay Anthony Michael Martinez *

Annabella, Margaret, Pamela Betsy Mugavero *

Clown 1, Compere, Henchman, Mrs. Higgins, Salesman 1,
Paperboy, Policeman 1, Professor Jordan, Sheriff,
McQuarrie, Heavy 1, Mrs. McGarrigle, Inspector Albright Maggie Kettering *

Clown 2, Mr. Memory, Henchman, Milkman, Salesman 2,
Policeman 2, Porter, Crofter, Mrs. Jordan, Inspector,
Dunwoody, Heavy 2, Mrs. McGarrigle Joe Wegner *

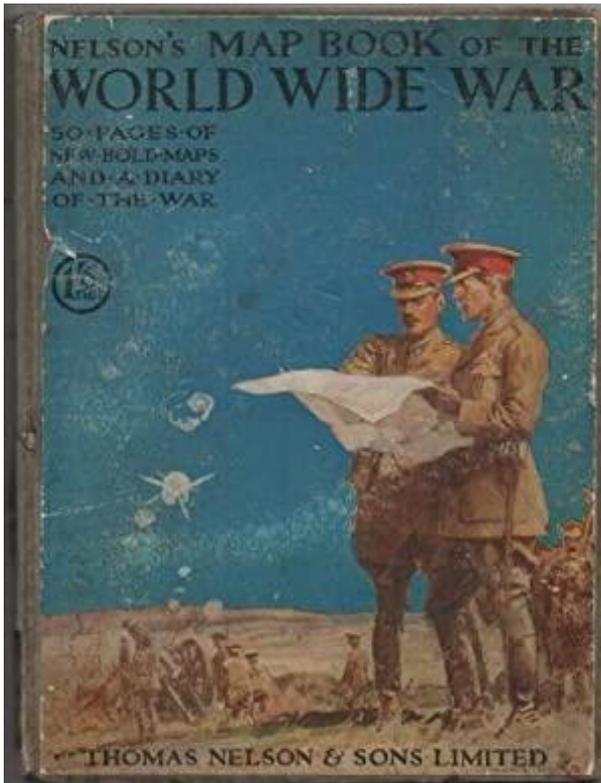
*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

PLAYNOTES

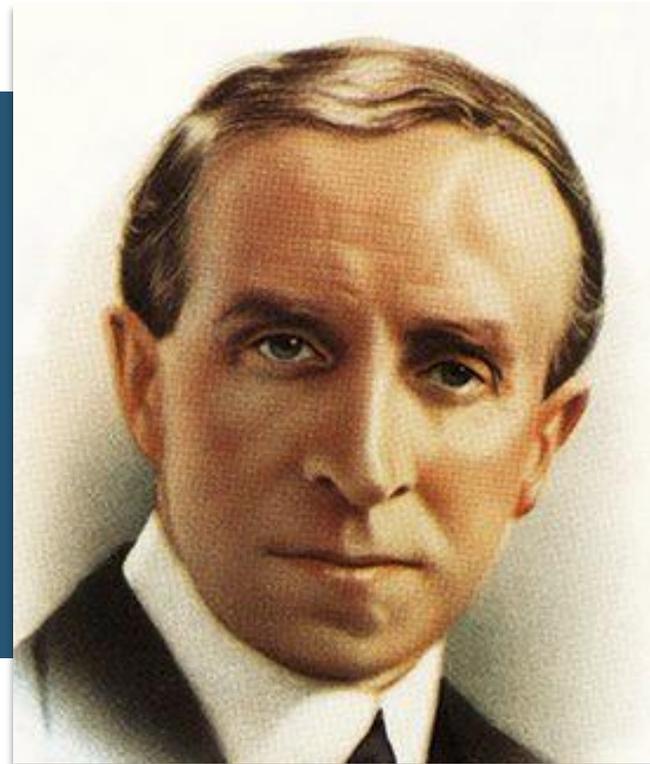
BY MARGARET LYNCH



The concoction of writers, sources, and exigencies worked. Throw in some menacing shadows, the foreboding Scottish moors at night, tilted camera angles, and tense, overlapping sound cues - and *The 39 Steps* became Hitchcock's breakthrough hit.



Ill health prevented Buchan from active service during WWI, but he contributed to the war effort by writing accounts of major battles and offensives as they were taking place. These accounts were serialized by Scottish publisher Thomas Nelson & Sons.



The story for *The 39 Steps* originated with John Buchan (1875-1940), a British writer and civil servant.

From novel to film to play, the story of *The 39 Steps* has passed through many hands on the way to the Hanna Theatre.

John Buchan (1875-1940)

The first hand was John Buchan's. In the summer of 1914, John Buchan was confined to bed. Austria-Hungary had declared war that July. An extended bout of ill health would prevent the British man from joining his contemporaries as they signed up to defend the Allied cause.

Buchan cast about for another way to contribute to the war effort. As a young man, he had won prizes for essays and poetry at Oxford. After a stint as a diplomatic secretary in South Africa, he had come back to England to join the editorial board of *The Spectator*, one of the world's most venerable weekly magazines. He was able to find a wartime role for himself with Thomas Nelson Publishers, based in his native Scotland. He was tasked with writing accounts of the major battles and Allied

Top: As the drumbeats for WWI sounded, Buchan was sick in bed. Though he had written historical fiction and magazine articles about current events, he decided to try his hand on what became a pioneering “spy thriller”—which was published in 1915 under the title, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.

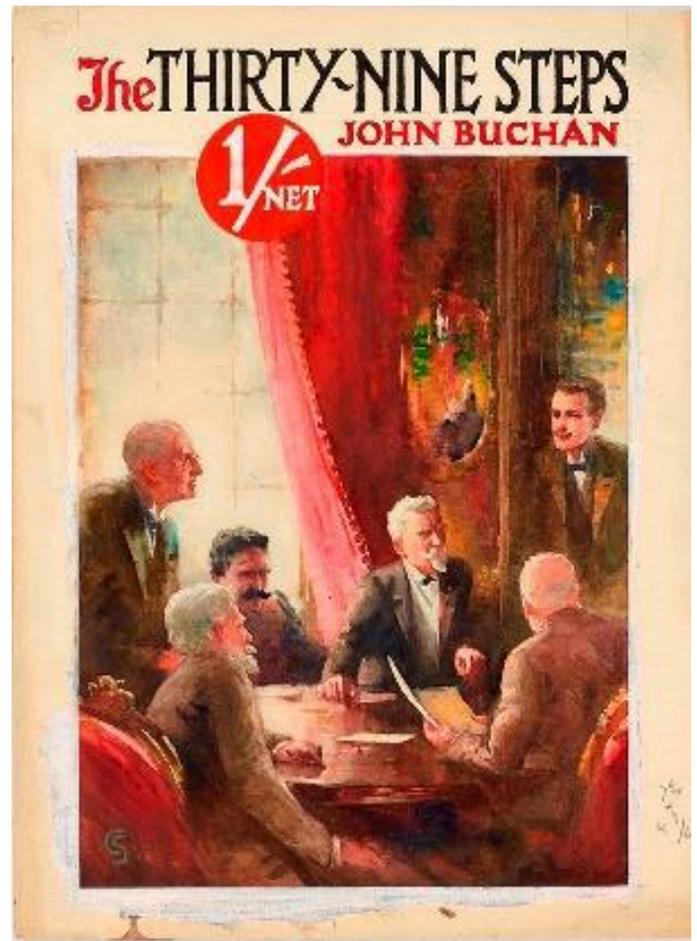
Bottom: Buchan was born in Scotland, and many of his stories were set among the hills, dales, and moors of his native land. As this map created for the 1947 edition of *The Thirty Nine Steps* suggests, the Scottish landscape played an important role in Buchan’s tale of an ordinary man, Richard Hannay, caught up in the machinations of a foreign spy ring.

offensives, as they were taking place. Between 1914 and 1919, he churned out 24 volumes, 50,000 words at a crack, which were serialized under the title *Nelson's History of the War*. These accounts brought Buchan to the attention of the British War and Foreign Offices, who hired him to write communiques.

Before his path ahead was clear however, Buchan entertained himself by writing what became one of the first British “spy thrillers.” He’d been publishing articles, essays, and stories most of his adult life, often on historical topics or current affairs. But the threats and patriotism of the day inspired the writer to strike out in a new vein, even as he set the action in the familiar Scottish landscape of his childhood. “I have amused myself in bed writing a shocker,” Buchan wrote to his editor at William Blackwood & Sons, the Scottish publishers. “It has amused me to write, but whether it will amuse you to read is another matter.”

Buchan’s “amusement” hit the mark. Blackwood released the story, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, in serial form during the summer of 1915. Sales were robust, warranting publication in book form in October. 33,000 copies sold in the first three months, and the book has remained in print ever since. Buchan went on to build several more thrillers around Richard Hannay, the central character of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. The “next Buchan” was anticipated in the same way that a modern audience might look forward to the next espionage novel of John Le Carré—to name an accomplished successor in the genre that Buchan pioneered.

Popular enthusiasm never translated to literary accolades, however. The writer continued to juggle writing with engagement in government and church politics and civic affairs. He served for a time as the President of the Scottish Historical Society and a trustee of the National Library of Scotland. And the government service side of Buchan’s career eventually took precedence, when he was appointed to serve as Governor General of Canada from 1935-1940.



Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1990)

The “first hand” to pass along the story of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was not the last. As Buchan’s granddaughter said in a note for the published playscript, “JB was never proprietorial about his work.” In the run-up to another World War, the film director Alfred Hitchcock took the story up again twenty years later.

The credit cannot be given to Alfred Hitchcock alone. In 1935, when Hitchcock’s film, *The 39 Steps*, was released, he was not yet the legendary auteur that he would become—though he was rising through the ranks of the British film studio system. From a working-class start—a Jesuit secondary school education and night classes at a technical school—the young Hitchcock had leapfrogged from clerking in a telegraph office to designing telegraph ads to drawing title cards for a silent movie production company.

A quick study, Hitchcock grew with the fledgling industry. He gravitated toward directing, absorbing the work of German, Soviet, and American filmmakers along the way. A deft hand at atmospheric suspense distinguished one of his most successful early silent films, *The Lodger* (1927), starring Ivor Novello. British International Pictures put Hitchcock at the helm for Britain’s first “talkie,” the 1929 film *Blackmail*.

For *Blackmail*, a dramatic thriller, Hitchcock had been paired with script-writer Charles Bennett. Gaumont-British Picture Corporation tapped the two to work together on a spy thriller based on John Buchan’s well-known novel. Bennett’s strength was in plot construction. Ian Hay—the pen name for John Hay Beith, who shared Buchan’s Scottish origins and “Oxbridge” education—was, brought in to polish the dialogue. Hitchcock rounded out the “writer’s room,” and his wife Alma, a screenwriter herself, was rumored to have weighed in as well. Hoping for box office in the US, the studio signed two British actors to the project who had some exposure and success in Hollywood—Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll.

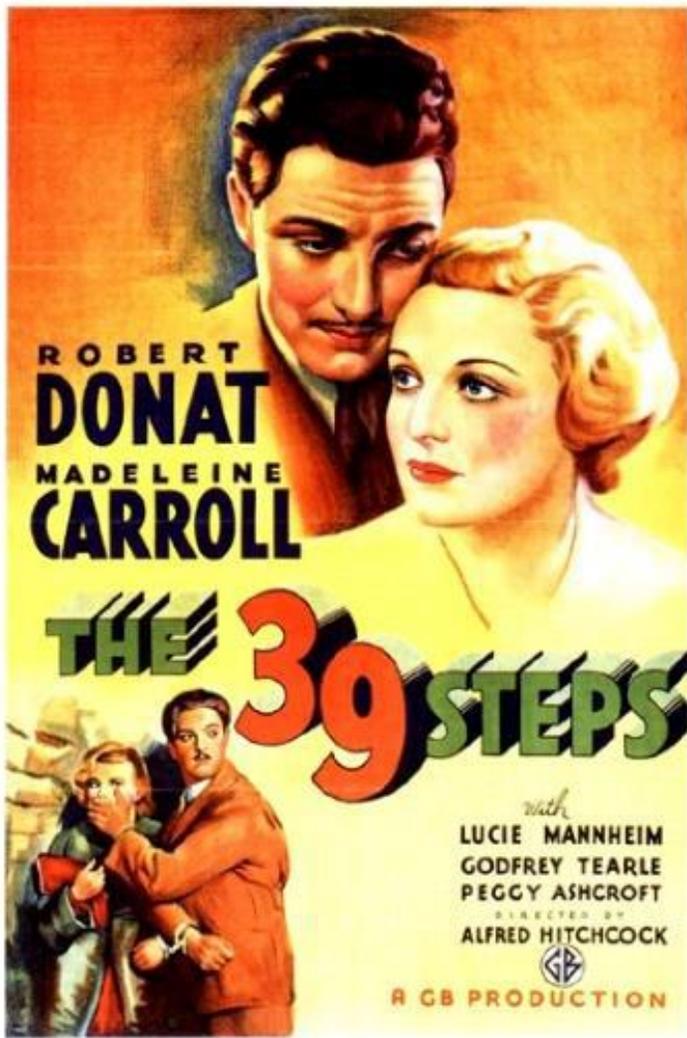
The writing team hewed to Buchan’s focus on an ordinary citizen accidentally caught up in a nefarious web of foreign espionage. The theme of “the wrong man”—an innocent man wrongly



The 1935 film, *The 39 Steps* helped to define the artistic persona of filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1990). *The 39 Steps* is often considered his breakthrough hit.

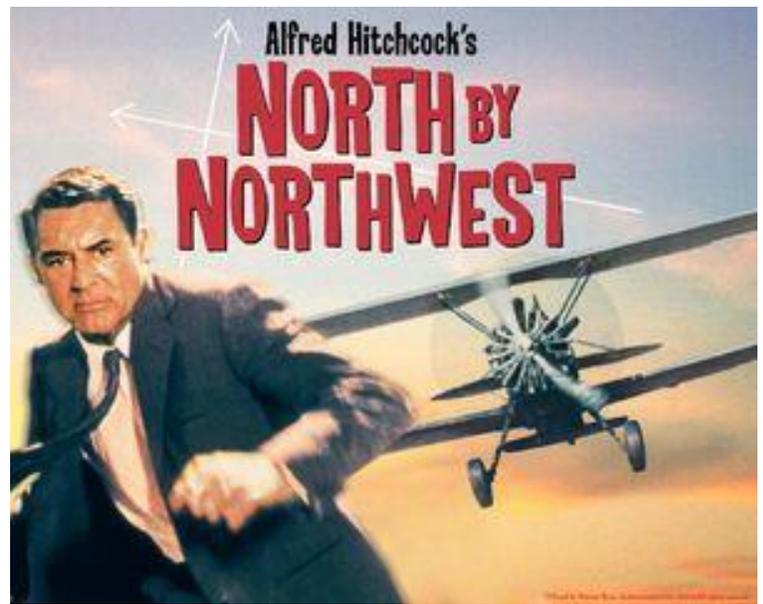


Depicted here on their wedding day in 1926—under the headline “Hitch Gets Hitched,” screenwriter Alma Reville played an important but often un-credited role in Hitchcock’s work, including *The 39 Steps*.



Gainsborough Pictures attached two British stars to the project---Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll. The studio hoped that their previous exposure in Hollywood would help expand the film's box office appeal in the US.

accused—would reverberate throughout Hitchcock's career from *The Lodger* through such later films as *North by Northwest* (1959). But, in Buchan's book, it's a man who sets in motion the plot that ensnares Richard Hannay; in Hitchcock's film it's a much more alluring, and foreign, "femme fatale." Also, with a blonde actress on hire, Hitchcock's film introduced a cool, sharp-edged heroine to confound Richard Hannay. Madeleine Carroll became the prototype for the many self-possessed blondes who would grace Hitchcock's later work. The concoction of writers, sources, and exigencies worked. Throw in some menacing shadows, the foreboding Scottish moors at night, tilted camera angles, and tense, overlapping sound cues - and *The 39 Steps* became Hitchcock's breakthrough hit.



The theme of the "wrong man" runs throughout Alfred Hitchcock's work, including the 1959 film starring Cary Grant, *North by Northwest*.



Madeleine Carroll, a self-possessed blonde, became the prototype for many of Hitchcock's later heroines, including Grace Kelly, pictured here in the 1954 film, *Rear Window*.

Patrick Barlow (b. 1947) et al

Already a novel and a film, this story needed one more set of hands to become a play. The stage process started with an actor and director named Nobby Dimon who aspired to bring small-scale theater productions to the village halls of northern England. To launch his North Country Theatre ca. 1995, Dimon was drawn to a "north country tale"—John Buchan's novel. Simon Corble, a Manchester-based English actor-director-writer, got wind of the project and asked in. With the help of a 1,000 £ grant from the Yorkshire Arts Council, Dimon and Corble assembled a few actors to workshop ideas. Shifting and assumed identities are a thru-line in the source material. The group soon landed on the concept of adapting the story for four quick-



After a long development phase, Patrick Barlow’s adaptation of *The 39 Steps* opened at the Criterion Theatre in London’s West End in September 2006—and ran for 9 years, the fifth longest running play in West End history.



Barlow’s adaptation recreates iconic scenes from Hitchcock’s movie that involve equally iconic landscapes and structures such as the Forth Rail Bridge—an early cantilever bridge that dramatically spans the “Firth of Forth” outside Edinburgh.

changing performers relying on minimalist props and set-pieces.

After an initial tour of North Country halls in 1996, Corble presented *The 39 Steps* at his own Midsommer Actors Company in Manchester and brought it to the London Fringe theatre, the Tabard. Both virtuosic and zany, the adaptation gathered attention along the way until producer Edward Snape bought the rights to the script in 2002.

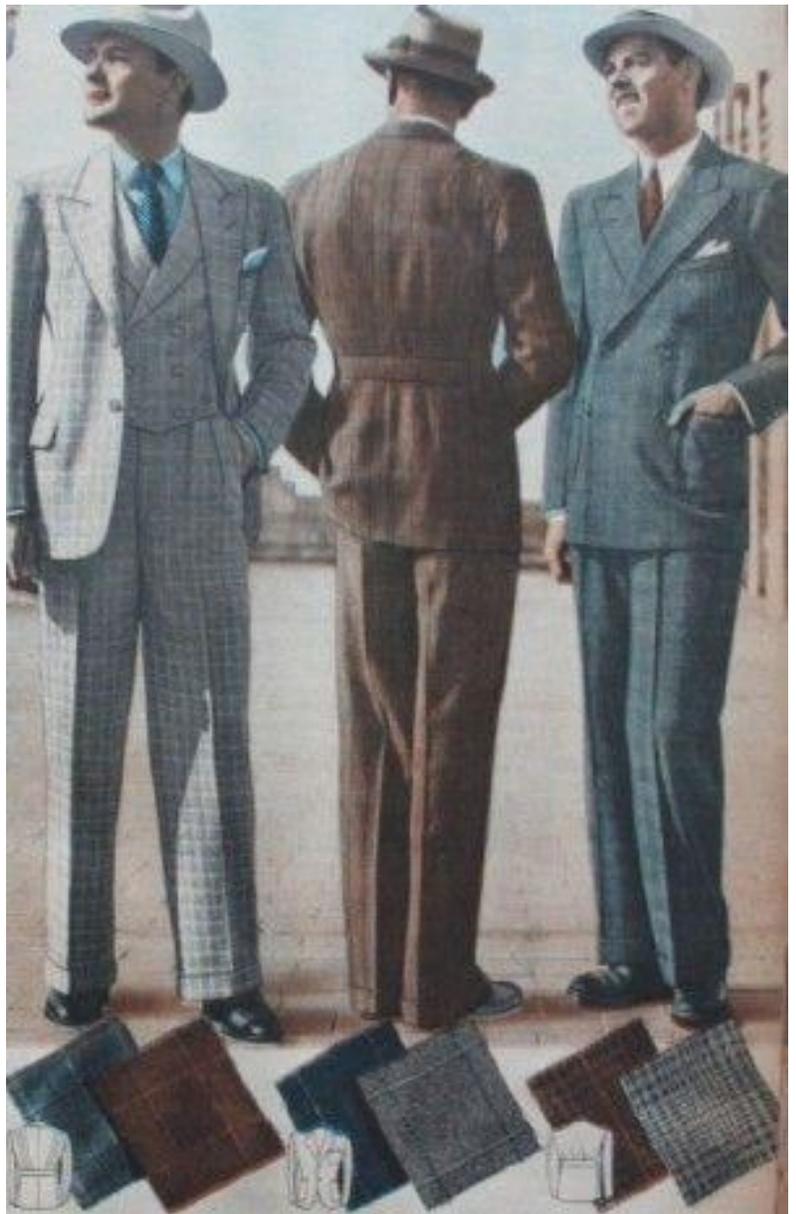
By 2004, a prominent English comedic performer had been asked to look at the script. Patrick Barlow was the anchoring member of a British comedy duo act that presents itself as the mock National Theatre of Brent. With such collaborators as actor Jim Broadbent at his side, Barlow had made a name delivering tongue-in-cheek “productions” on radio and television. In part because of difficulties with the Buchan estate, in part because Hitchcock’s version of the story is both better known (especially in the US) and sexier, Barlow ended up doing a new adaptation that was more firmly grounded in Hitchcock’s film.

Barlow wisely retained the 4-performer approach first developed by Dimon and Corble. Between incidental train conductors, Salvation Army band members, policemen, and traveling salesmen, not to mention the

“main” characters who carry the convoluted plot, at least 150 characters need to be impersonated—some for mere seconds of stage time. Hats and jackets were donned and shed, and boxes stood in for train cars during the obligatory chase atop a moving train. Verisimilitude was not a goal.

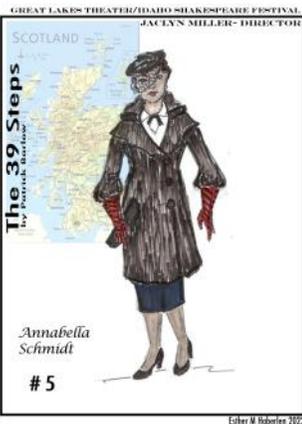
As a critic from *The Guardian* observed in 2006, “Patrick Barlow’s adaptation bears the hallmarks of his work with the National Theatre of Brent, in that it tells an epic tale while comically accentuating theatre’s unsuitability for the task.” An *Independent* critic simply dubbed it “highly inventive silliness.” After a London premiere in 2006 at the Tricycle Theatre, the play moved to the West End—London’s equivalent of Broadway—for a 9-year run, making it the fifth longest running play in West End history. The play transferred to Broadway in 2008 and ran for 771 performances. Recognition included an Olivier Award for Best Comedy in 2007. The Broadway production also won the 2008 Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. The spy-thriller-that-could now continues its surprising journey as a play seen round the world.

PAGE TO STAGE



Top: Costume designer Esther Haberlen collected images of British gentlemen in suits for her research, knowing that central character, Richard Hannay, must have the appearance of a British everyman.

Left: Alfred Hitchcock's film introduced a "femme fatale" into Buchan's story—a mysterious foreign agent who brings nothing but trouble. 1930s silhouettes that convey the aura of a "femme fatale" were also part of Haberlen's research.



Pictured above are costume designer Esther Haberlen's renderings for Annabella Schmidt and Richard Hannay.

GLT's Production Team

The last set of hands that the story has passed through before reaching the stage of the Hanna Theatre belongs to the creative team that Great Lakes Theater has assembled for this production, with director Jaclyn Miller at the helm. Miller has a background as a choreographer and has created movement for a variety of recent GLT productions, from *The Music Man* to *Julius Caesar*. Miller's training is well-suited for a show whose storytelling relies, as the director observes, on "the creative use of bodies in space."

Patrick Barlow's unabashedly theatrical adaptation only provided the starting point for the assembled team. They embraced the theatricality by creating a "framing device" for jumpstarting the action. The conceit requires four people to bring the story to life using props and costumes that might be found in a 1930s-era theater space--onstage, backstage, or in costume and set storage. The four performers and the objects "at hand" have to represent more than 150 characters in rapidly changing locations and plot circumstances.

The playscript for *The 39 Steps* evolved from a series of improv sessions, and the text memorializes some of

the original design and performance solutions. Some are no-brainers. As costume designer Esther Haberlen admits, there are only three kinds of costume elements that can help produce instantaneous character changes onstage—"jackets, hats, and accessories."

But each production of the play needs to recreate the original improv process. During rehearsal, GLT's director and performers had to find the solutions to the storytelling challenges that work best for four particular people in real-time. As Miller reflects, "How does each person's body move? We have to build on that. The execution is all in the alchemy of the people in the room." It

helps that GLT can draw on a mix of new faces and resident company members who have what Miller calls "a shorthand, a playfulness that come with people who know each other so well."

Miller tasked the costume and set designers with supplying lots of "stuff" for the rehearsal room—the afore-mentioned jackets, hats, and accessories, as well as costume trunks, rehearsal cubes, step ladders, and the like—to find out what objects might best support the storytelling.

The design questions compounded: What objects can be pulled "as is" from GLT's own costume and set storage? What items need to be built to accommodate theatrical "tricks"? Does a shift need to happen quickly onstage? If so, how can the item be built so that an actor can execute the change? Where does the object need to be located for easy access onstage? Is the item already visible or is a reveal involved? Do some changes need to be made offstage? What kind of offstage help is needed to pull them off?

First and foremost, the designers' choices had to support lightning-quick

Splashes of color are also important to the production's sense of fun and are an important part of the wardrobe choices as well. Pictured here are some clothing options for the brisk and confident character originated by Madeleine Carroll.



movement. The weight of objects or clothing had to be considered. Lightness was paramount in clothing, for instance. But for set pieces, lightness sometimes had to be sacrificed for stability.

“Everything has to be climbable,” cautions set designer Courtney O’Neill. Wheels may have been added so that set pieces could more easily crisscross the stage, but locking mechanisms had to be built-in as well.

During the rehearsal process, the production team had to constantly update a spreadsheet tracking what objects and backstage helpers were needed when and where. Three dedicated wardrobe people were hired to assist with quick changes—during the rehearsal process and for the run of the show. They have learned the show “backwards and forwards,” Haberlen says—becoming an integral part of the choreography of people and objects as it was shaping up. “They are as much a part of the performance as the actors are,” she adds.

But utility and practicality were not the only factors that the designers had to consider. The stage show blends the atmospheric “film noir” style of Alfred Hitchcock’s work with the zaniness of Patrick Barlow’s adaptation. The scenic designer was called upon to provide sharp, off-kilter angles that could be lit in ominous ways, while bright colors, patterns, and inventive layering were also required of the costume designer.

Indeed, as the action of the thriller ratchets up so does the intricacy of the dance of costumes, performers, and set pieces. A wardrobe trunk may function as a piece of luggage or a car seat, but it can also be upended to define yet another pop-up

location. The re-purposing gets more clever and more absurd by turns. For it’s up to the last set of hands--the GLT production team—to bring the wow factor that tops off a virtuosic piece of storytelling.



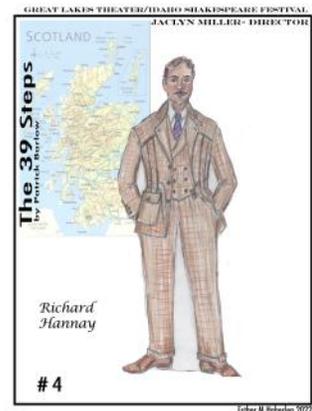
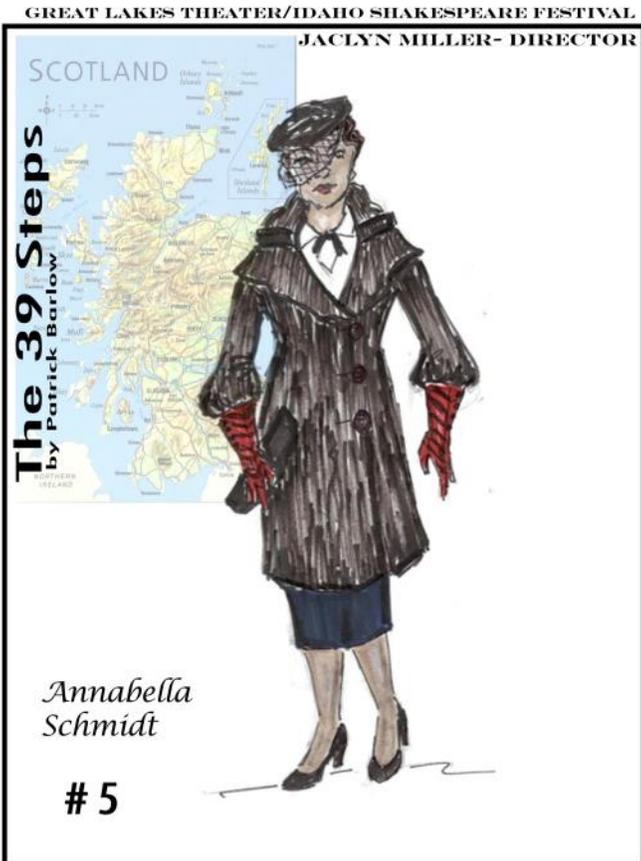
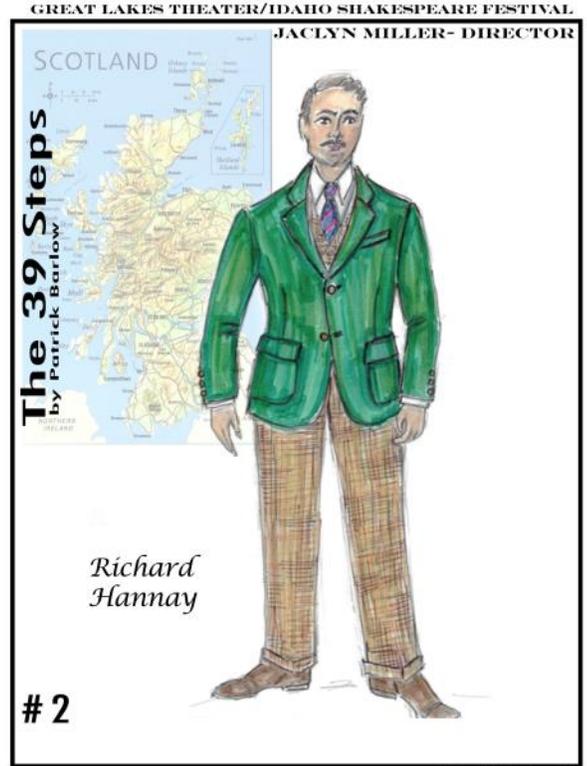
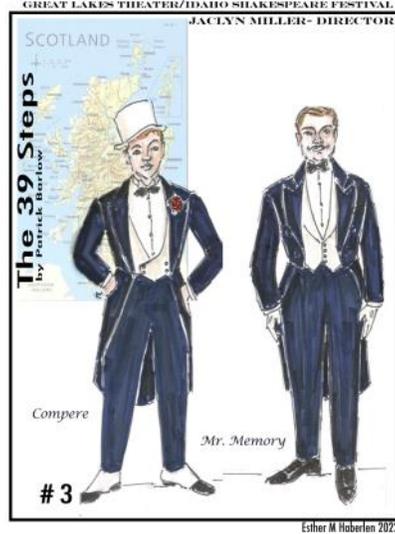
An essential part of the storytelling, in all its versions, is the journey through a variety of locations, including John Buchan’s native Scotland. The dour crofter, or small-scale farmer, is a prototypical Scottish type.



In Alfred Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps*, the film director employed a “film noir” style influenced by German expressionist cinematography and marked by dark settings, striking uses of light and off-kilter camera angles, shadows, and silhouettes. Scenic designer Courtney O’Neill had to provide for such angles and sources for dramatic lighting in her set design for the GLT production.

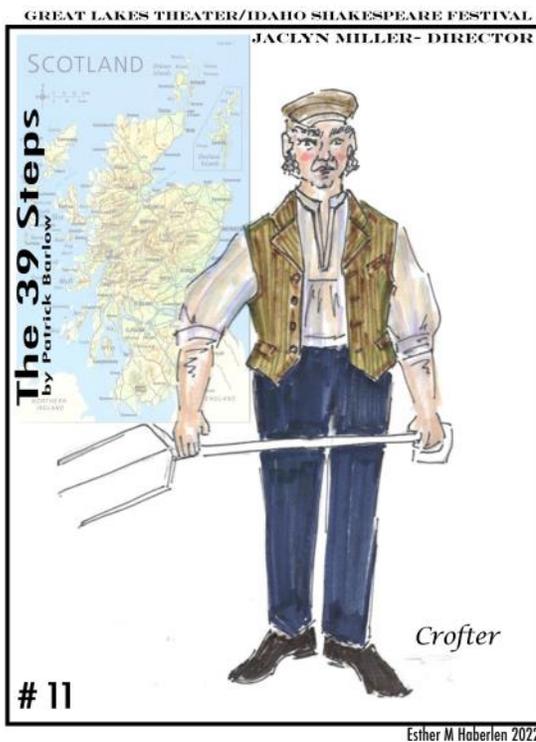
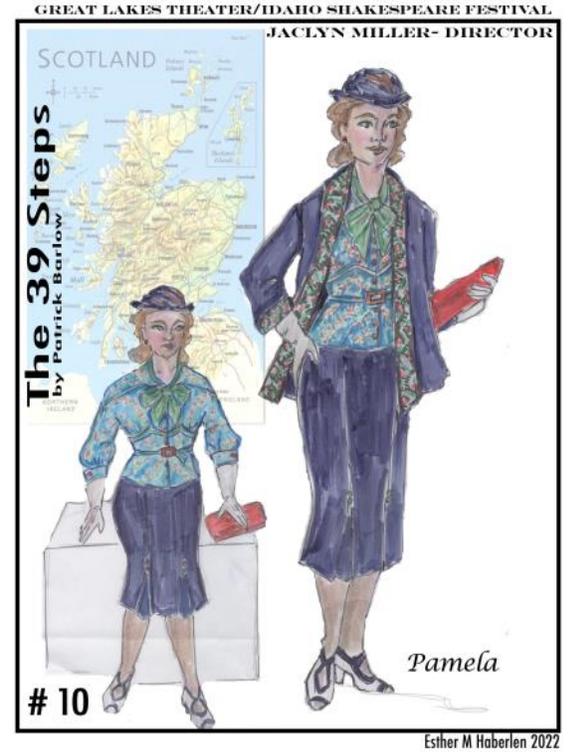
COSTUME DESIGN

by Esther M. Haberlen



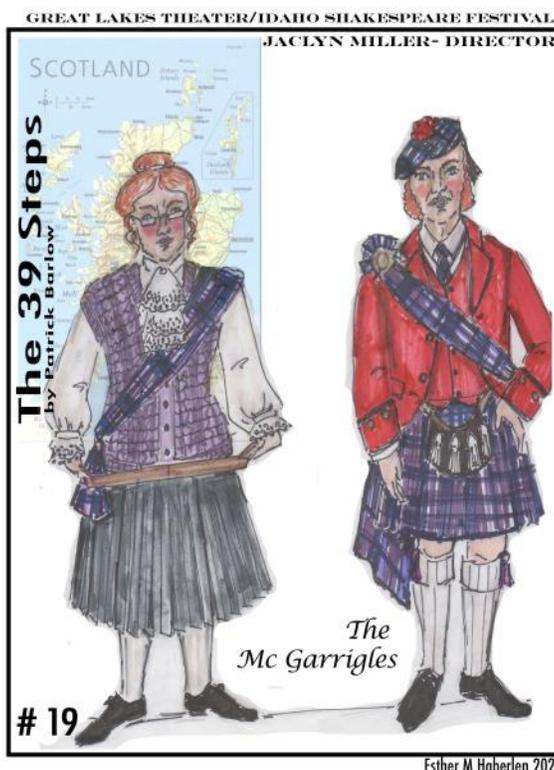
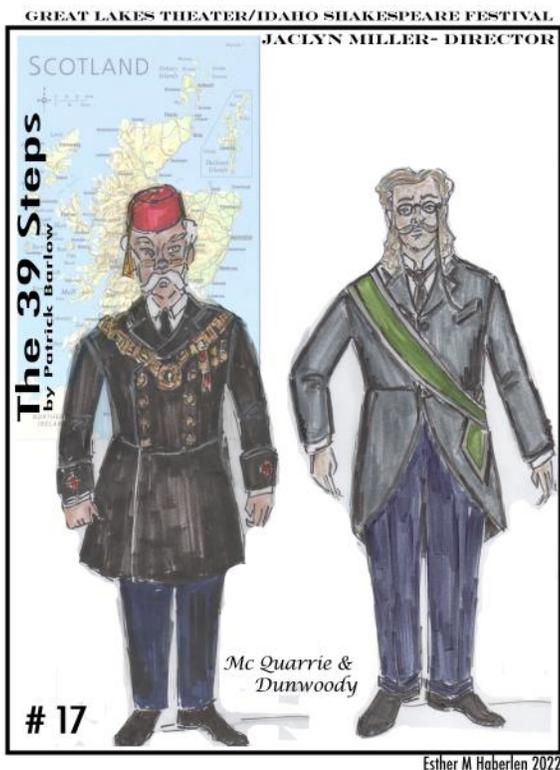
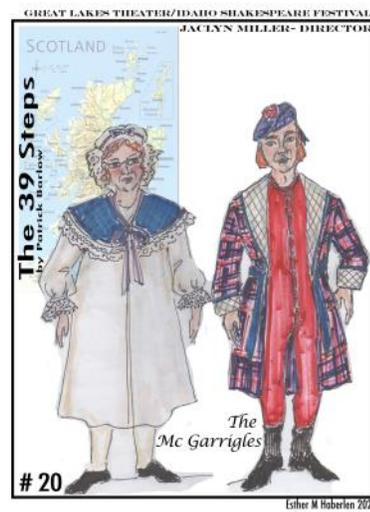
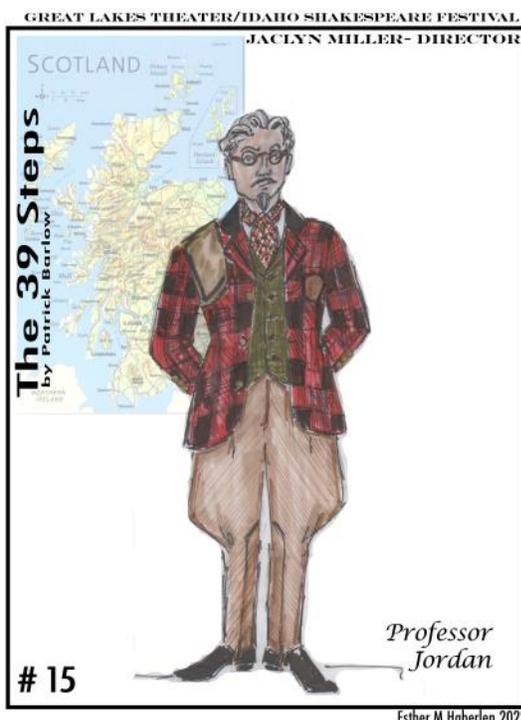
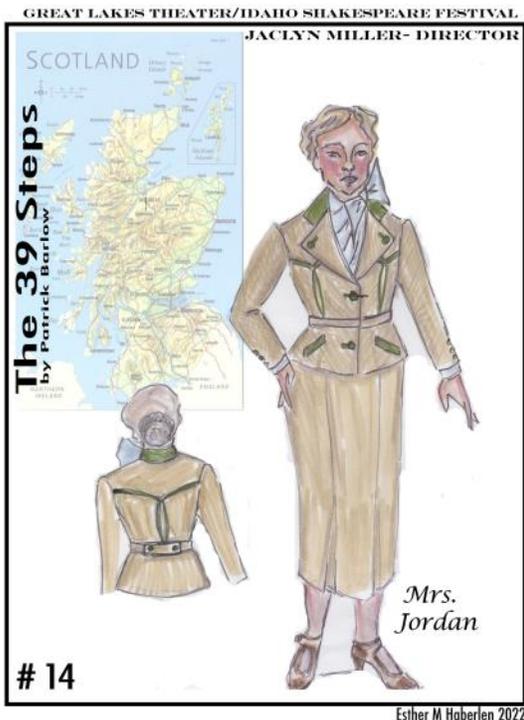
COSTUME DESIGN

by Esther M. Haberlen



COSTUME DESIGN

by Esther M. Haberlen



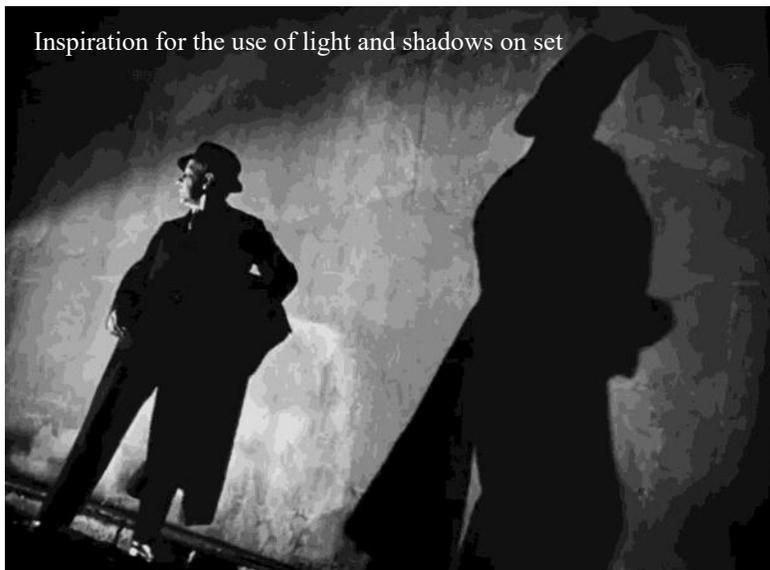
SCENIC INSPIRATION AND DESIGN

by Courtney O'Neill



Photo of the set model for the Hanna stage

Inspiration for the use of light and shadows on set



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: BEFORE ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What elements are needed to create a good thriller? A good comedy? What role does suspense and surprise play in good story telling? Why would you combine those two different genres together?
2. What is a parody? Is there a show, movie, or internet artist you watch that parodies other stories? What draws you to those types of performances? Why do parodies exist? What makes a story able to be parodied? In what ways might they add to or take away from the original work?
3. *The 39 Steps* is an adaptation of a 1935 film, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, which is a loose adaptation of the 1915 novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by John Buchan. This is a common practice in our country (think Disney movies turned into a theatrical version, or books turned into movies). What is an adaptation? What is your favorite adaptation? Why? Why do you think books are adapted for movies or plays?
4. Secret information pertaining to an impending war starts the action for the novel (on the eve of World War I) as well as the film and play (World War II). If you had to update the story, which military conflict would you set it just before and why?
5. Richard Hannay starts the play wishing his life was more exciting. Do you think he regrets his wish? What does the phrase “be careful what you wish for” mean? Have you ever wished for something and, when you received it, then wished it were different? Should Hannay have wished for his life to be less dull?
6. Who is your favorite accidental hero character? Why do you think that kind of character appears so frequently in stories?
7. Have you ever been accused of something you didn’t do? How did you prove your innocence?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Many stories start with a main character who is unhappy with their life but is that always the case? Write a story about a person who is content with their life. What kind of adventure would that person have?
2. In what ways is the Professor the perfect villain for a spy thriller? Create your own perfect villain character; what traits, talents, and abilities would they have? What would be their evil plan? What is their motivation and how would they achieve it? Who would be the perfect hero to foil their plans? How would your hero stop the villain?
3. Compare and contrast some scenes from the play's performance and the 1935 film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Which version do you connect with more? Why?
4. *The 39 Steps* has been written and adapted as a serious spy thriller as well as a parody. What elements are needed for each one? Write the same short story two different ways: as a comedy and as a serious drama.
5. Richard Hannay is almost recognized by two traveling salesmen on the train because of a newspaper article about the murder of Annabella Schmidt. Imagine you are a newspaper journalist with no inside knowledge of the incident. Write an article based on the facts at hand.
6. How would *The 39 Steps* change if the characters had access to social media? Choose a character and write a series of personal "updates."
7. Write a review of the play (see page 25).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

ACTIVITIES

1. **TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE** game: In a circle, have a student tell two truths and a lie about themselves and have others guess. Then discuss why the guessing worked as it did. What did the students do to get others to believe the “lie”?
2. **MURDERER** game: Have students sit on the floor in a circle with their eyes closed. Tap one student on the head. This student is the “murderer.” Once the murderer is picked, the students open their eyes and try to discover who the murderer is without being “killed.” The murderer kills victims by winking at them. When winked at, a victim silently counts to three (so that they don’t give away who “killed” them), makes a disgusting noise, and dies. If a student in the circle thinks they knows who the murderer is, they close their eyes and raises their hand. As soon as three students think they know who the murderer is, ask them to identify the murderer. If they are wrong, they are out. If they are right the murderer then gets to choose the next murderer by going through the process above. You could vary the game by choosing more than one murderer. These games encourage good observation and control. Following the game(s) students can discuss why some things worked better than others and how to be crafty and fool others. This can be tied into the idea of secret agents and arch villains.
3. **ACTING COMEDY**: Using the scene below, explore how the use of fewer actors creates a sense of the bustling energy of an early 20th century train station as well as the comedy of the play. Have students create the train car from desks and chairs or other furniture in the room. How do you create the window of the car that the audience and Hannay is viewing the train station from? What items found in the room can they use to show different characters? Perform the scene one time with a different person as each character. Where do the actors come in from and leave? Next time through, have only two actors perform as Salesmen 1 and 2, Porter, Police, Paperboy, and Mrs. Higgins. How do they change their characters? Do they do it in front of the audience or try to hide it? Which is funnier? Which gives a better sense of busy space?

EXCERPT FROM SCENE 8

SALESMAN 2. Think I’ll pop out to the buffet car. Finished? (*snatches paper from HANNAY*)
Fancy anythin’?

SALESMAN 1. No thank you.

HANNAY. No thank you.

SALESMAN 2. Right you are.

(*He leaves the compartment. Squeezes past.*)

SALESMAN 2. Excuse me. Sorry. Sorry.

SALESMAN 1. Sorry. Sorry.

HANNAY. Sorry.

(*Salesman 1 glances out of the window.*)

SALESMAN 1. Good Heavens! Place is stiff with police!
(HANNAY freezes. Salesman 1 pulls down window. Calls out.)
Excuse me Constable! Caught the West End murderer yet?
(Salesman 2 appears in a police hat.)

POLICEMAN. We'll catch him, don't you worry sir!

SALESMAN 1. That's the spirit!
(Policeman changes into porter's hat.)

PORTER. All aboard for the Highlands! Next stop the highlands!
(Changes into PC hat.)

POLICEMAN. Anything suspicious let us know sir!

SALESMAN 1. Oh yes. Don't you worry!
(PC changes into porter's hat.)

PORTER. All aboard! All aboard!
(Salesman 1 puts on paperboy hat.)

PAPERBOY. Final edition sir? Final edition.
(Porter changes into Salesman 2 hat.)

SALESMAN 2. No thank you!
(Salesman 2 puts on porter hat.)

PORTER. All aboard! All aboard!
(Paperboy puts on salesman hat.)

SALESMAN 1. Alright, alright!
(Porter puts on policeman hat.)

POLICEMAN. Keep your eyes peeled won't you sir!

SALESMAN 1. Certainly will constable!

POLICEMAN. Don't forget sir!

SALESMAN 1. No I won't constable.
(changes into paperboy hat)

PAPERBOY. Read all about it!! Read all about it!!
(Policeman puts on porter hat.)

PORTER. All aboard! All aboard!
(Porter puts on police hat.)

POLICEMAN. Anything suspicious, let us know sir.
(Paperboy changes into Salesman 1.)

SALESMAN 1. Will do, constable.
(Policeman puts on porter hat.)

PORTER. All aboard! All aboard!
(Salesman 1 changes into Mrs Higgins hat.)

MRS HIGGINS. Is this the 9.41 to Reading?

PORTER. Platform Twelve!

MRS HIGGINS. Thankoo!

PORTER. All aboard let's be havin' yer! *(blows whistle)*

HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

"Gambit": More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

VOCABULARY

1. Liverish - disagreeable; crabbed; melancholy
2. Flat - British; an apartment or suite of rooms on one floor forming a residence
3. The West End - the main entertainment district of London; England's equivalent to Broadway
4. Compere - a host or master of ceremonies (MC), especially of a stage entertainment or television program
5. Conceive - to form a notion or idea of; imagine
6. Extrinsic/extrinsinsic - a malapropism for extrinsic; not essential or inherent; extraneous
7. Supernumary/supernernumary - a malapropism for supernumerary; being in excess of the usual number or amount; extra
8. Mae West - an early film star who worked for seven decades, known for her bold commentaries on conservative opinions and social mores
9. Haddock/herring - fish from the North Atlantic ocean that are staple food in some parts of England and Scotland
10. Persecution mania - an accurate, irrational fear that other people are plotting one's downfall
11. Trilbies - hats made of soft felt with an indented crown
12. Pub - a bar or tavern
13. Shakedown - any makeshift bed
14. Paroxysms - any sudden, uncontrolled outburst; a sudden attack of emotion or action
15. Pound note - British currency
16. Garrulous - excessively talkative in a rambling manner, especially about trivial matters
17. Biscuit - what the British call a cookie
18. BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation; publicly funded, the BBC is popularly considered to be old fashioned and conservative in its entertainment content.
19. The highlands - the northern and western areas of Scotland
20. Communication cord - a chain a passenger on a train can pull to stop the train in an emergency
21. Girders - the main horizontal support beam used in construction used to support smaller beams

-
22. Crofter - a person who rents or owns a small farm in England and Scotland
 23. Itinerant - working in a place for a short time and then moving to another location to work at a different job
 24. Harris tweed - a very expensive, handwoven wool cloth
 25. Inhospitable - not favorable conditions, barren
 26. Apprehension - the act of arresting
 27. Impenetrable - unable to penetrate, by sight, touch, movement, force, etc.
 28. Acquaintances - being casually familiar with someone
 29. Convey - take from one place to another
 30. Mein lieblich - German; my darling
 31. Sentimental - having tender feelings such as love, pity, or nostalgia
 32. Pusillanimous - cowardly
 33. Amateur - an unskilled or inexperienced person in a particular activity
 34. Garibaldi - a particular sandwich cookie made with a squashed fruit filling
 35. Illustrious - highly distinguished; famous
 36. Bracing - strengthening
 37. Procurator Fiscal - a public lawyer in Scotland who prosecutes cases involving fines, murder, and police investigations
 38. Stile - a series of steps by means of which a person may pass over a wall or fence that is a barrier to cows or sheep
 39. Conspiracy - an unlawful, evil plan created in secret by two or more people
 40. Ken - Scottish; to know or understand
 41. Squeamish - easily shocked by anything slightly immodest
 42. Madame Tassauds - museum in London that displays full-sized wax statues of famous people
 43. London Palladium - A theater in the West End entertainment district
 44. surreptitiously - acting in a stealthy or secret way

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: AFTER ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. How does repetition add to the comedy of the performance? What are all the different types of repetition you heard and saw?
2. Do you think Hannay is changed by his adventure in this play? In what ways has he changed? Are those changes for the better? Did he get the ending he deserved?
3. This play contains a MacGuffin — a plot device in a work of fiction, often a physical object, that drives the plot forward without factoring into the story’s resolution (dictionary.com). Examples include The Ark of the Covenant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*, the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings*, and plans for the Death Star in *Star Wars*. What is the MacGuffin in *The 39 Steps*? Why do you think MacGuffins are used in stories?
4. This play is highly awarded, receiving or being nominated for awards in the United States, United Kingdom, and France as well as being the 5th longest running play on the West End (England’s version of Broadway). Now that you’ve seen it, would you agree that it deserves these accolades? Why?
5. Hannay uses both the truth and lies to get the help he needs throughout the play. Why is the truth hard for some people to believe? If you heard Hannay’s story would you believe him and how would you help him? Have you ever lied to get help? Why?
6. Why do you think the play repeatedly mentions how handsome Hannay is? What does Hannay’s appearance have to do with the action of the story? How did the appearance of the actor help or hinder this heard repetition? How does this contrast with the descriptions of the women he comes across throughout the play, which are only in the stage directions as opposed to the dialogue?
7. How do costumes and props help tell this story? In what ways did this production’s use of costumes and props help you follow the action and characters?
8. The Director’s Notes mentions that when Alfred Hitchcock updated the story for his movie he made “the piece more fitting of the country’s current circumstances.” Why do you think Barlow chose not to update the setting to one closer to our own? In what ways would updating this play to a contemporary setting affect the way the story is told?
9. Many action and spy stories have a character that is a romantic partner for the main protagonist. Why do you think they are usually added? Alfred Hitchcock created the character of Pamela for his film adaptation of the novel (whom Patrick Barlow kept in his stage adaptation of the movie). If she and the romantic elements were removed from the story, how might it affect how you reacted to Hannay and the perils he went through. If “winning the girl” weren’t a part of the reward at the end, would this be a satisfactory ending? Why or why not?
10. This play required four actors to play all of the characters (about 250, according to Patrick Barlow.) Why do you think he chose four actors? How many would you choose and why? In what ways did you enjoy seeing two of the actors playing so many different characters? Usually performances try to disguise the fact that an actor is playing more than one character (called-double casting) - did this production try to do that? Which way would you prefer? What would you change, if anything, about how the actors switched into different characters and why?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

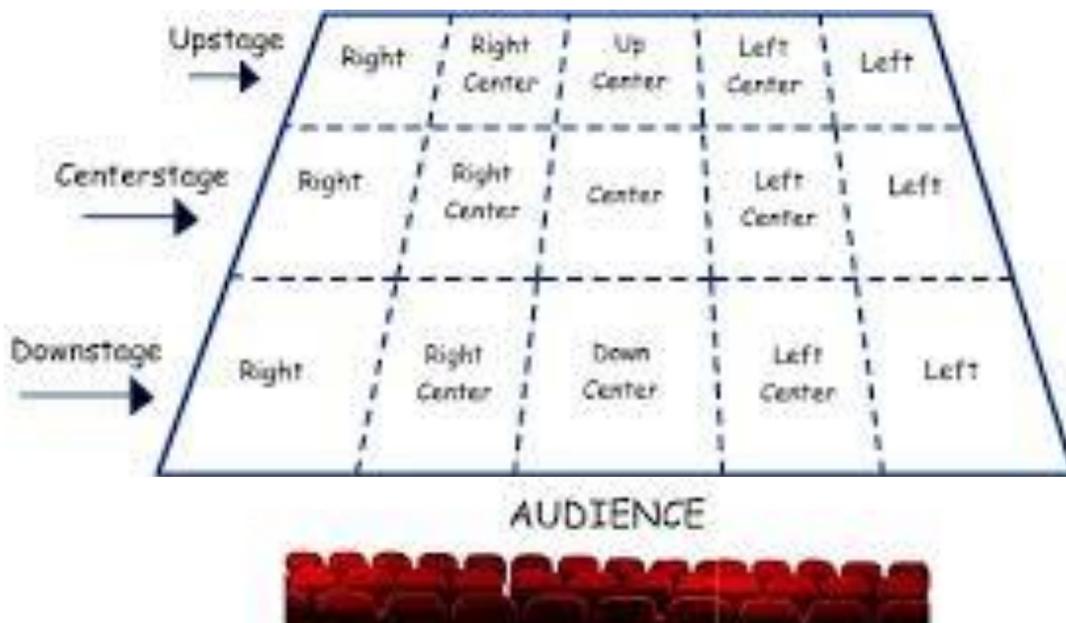
A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

Apron	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
Auditorium or House	Where the audience sits
Beam Spread	The area a single light covers
Blackout	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
Board	The control center for lights, sound, or both
Book (The)	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
Box Office	Where the audience buys tickets
Box Set	A set in a proscenium with three walls
Call	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
Cheat	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
Cloth	Scenery painted on fabric
Cue	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
Curtain Call	The bows at the end of the show
Dimmer	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
Director	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
Flat	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
Floodlight	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
Fly	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
Follow-spot	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
Footlights	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
Gel	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
Greenroom	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
Notes	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
Pit	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
Producer	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).
Properties or Props	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc.)
Proscenium	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically

distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).

Raked Stage	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
Set	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
Set Dressing	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
Spotlight	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
Strike	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
Thrust	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
Tracks	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run.
Trap	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
Understudy	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
Upstage	The rear of the stage
Wings	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

STAGE DIRECTIONS





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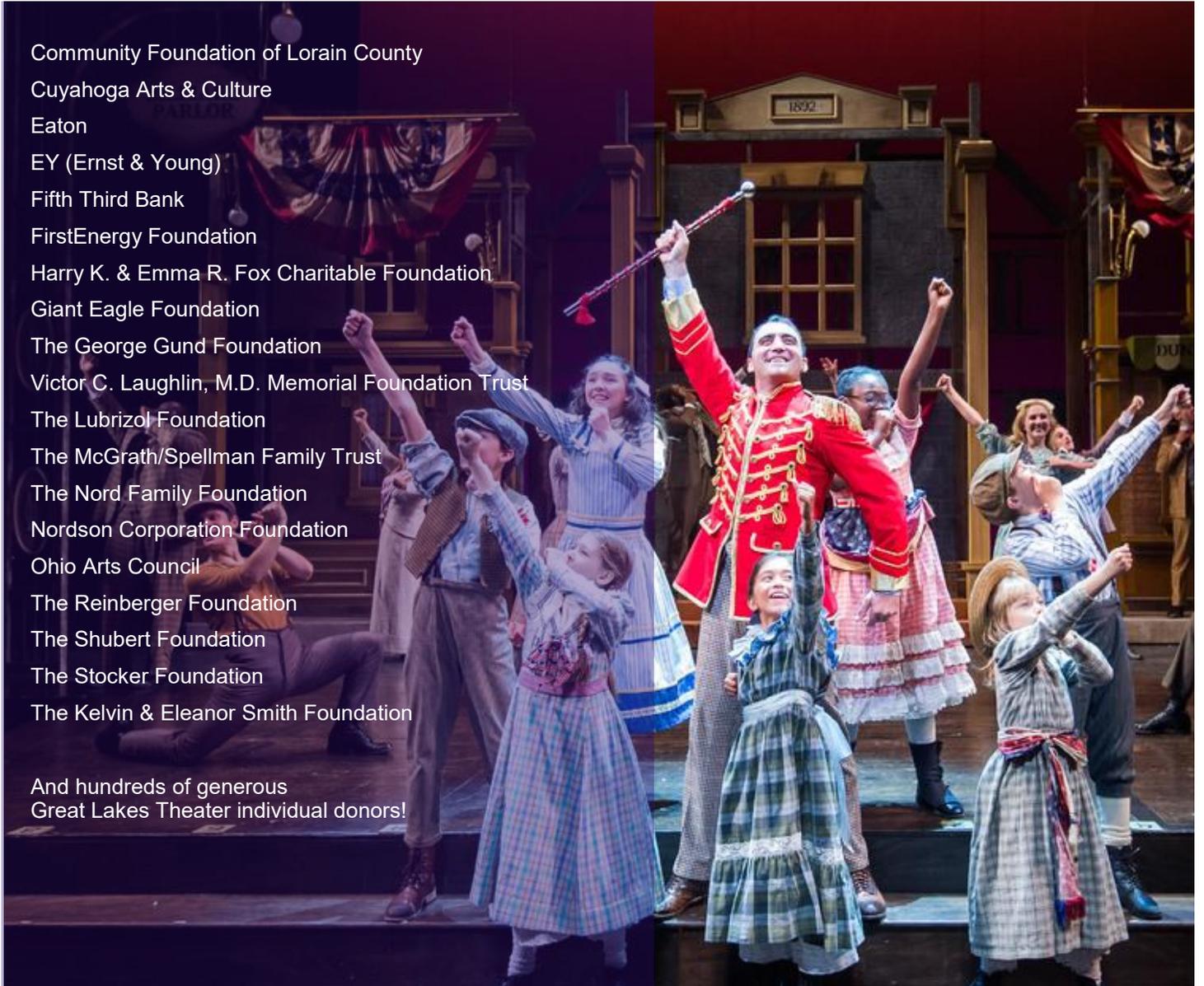
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ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for almost 40 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

1501 Euclid Avenue, Suite 300 • Cleveland, Ohio 44115 • Tel. (216) 241-5490

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