

Drama unit 1 assignment

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Theatre Critique – 39 steps Maarten Round A play about spying: could be rather mysterious and uninteresting. Yet there's one exception that manages to combine thrill, enigma, as well as action with laughter. "The 39 Steps," proves to be an amusing, entertaining, and action-filled play. The play was written by Patrick Barlow for the Comedy/Spy audience, the result is a brilliant, fast-moving spoof in which the entire company, remarkably only four actors, entertain us all hugely with great skill and real wit. I was able to witness "The 39

Steps" at the Royal ; Derogate in Northampton; we had traveled early evening and the play was expected to begin at half-past seven. I had a high anticipation for what the night would bring as for it being at night made me feel like the play was going to be dark and almost mysterious. The play was known for its wit and gags, which I absolutely love in a Comedy. Being a Comedy: I expected the mass use of props, physical theatre and cross-cutting. I was a little bit skeptical of the choice of only having 4 actors as I honestly thought to myself: "How on Earth is that possible? UT as the play progressed, the stage no longer belonged to 4 actors; it belonged to 139 characters and it seemed 139 actors. The way they interchange is extraordinary. In the tram scene, one of the 2 most versatile men on stage, changed his hat during the scene a countless number of times, and you believed it all and it was hysterical. The whole pace of the show is amazing; it's really fast and full on, gathering an exciting momentum all the time, and all the cast work together seamlessly like a well-oiled machine.

They also recreate a variety of sets and locations with just a handful of props – a few suitcases, a door, a window frame, a very Jolly toy train and with the

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help of a very lively lighting and sound plot. As for the backdrop, it never really changed and as an audience member I expected major set change; however I was proven wrong due to the brilliant team of the 4 actors. I never even noticed that it had been the same throughout the play, which just goes to show how involved an audience member can get without all these fancy things, which is beautifully simple.

Scene One was Richard Hannay's opening monologue, spot light on actor Richard Deed ND you are immediately drawn into his past. Simple furniture was used in the scene which I liked because it's relatable, you feel comfortable and most importantly you get close to the character before the play even properly starts. This made me feel as though through the play I was connected to Richard Hannay and empathetic with everything he went through.

Richard Hannay was wearing a brown waistcoat with matching trousers and blazer; this allowed me to unlock the setting of the early 1930s as soon as Richard Hannay was revealed, along with all the old fashioned furniture which immediately gives us an idea on when the play was set because these elements were key to the 1930s era. My personal favorite theme of the play was the use of minor props i.e. The window (frame) - As Richard Hannay was escaping from the farmhouse, the Farmer's Daughter looked eagerly out of the window to see if her Father was coming, at this point, my sides had already hurt but this added to my enjoyment.

Charlotte Peters never breaks face and the use of mime and props worked so well that I sat there almost crying to laughter. The tram was used as a

window in which the actors would hold up and would be able to look at the outside world, this added dimension and variety to the play. For an audience member, a piece of drama is always funnier if the main characters take themselves seriously because you feel as though it is real because you'd expect them to be laughing just as hard as you.

Richard Hannah then preceded to try and escape the farmhouse to which the Daughter responded with "Take the back window" which was brilliant because she had been looking out the front window so had to run over to the other side with the frame (adding pace and more laughter) and that exact same frame becomes the back window and it is so, incredibly and fascinatingly realistic. He then realized that he couldn't get through the window and whilst I was in stitches he shook his head to the audience and pulled the window over him and although the other audience members found it hilarious, I found it a complete insult to the build-up of the scene.

The scene was no longer realistic and for the rest of the scene I felt almost too close to Richard Hannah. I would have loved it if they had left this bit out and maybe the frame grew or something other than ruining this delightful scene because I felt that all the momentum the scene grew with the use of looking through the window, running from back to front and even there just being a window, it was all completely swept under the rug by the use of engaging the audience members with the characters. By doing this, they no longer are characters, but they are just some friends you have come to see at the theatre.

Back onto the positives: In one scene when all 4 actors were in the car at once and heading towards the police station was one of the funniest I've ever seen. It had everything from: props, staging and mist! The use of props was undoubtedly clever as they had one wheel and 4 seats, yet you were too focused on the characters that you didn't notice how simplistic the staging was. They all jumped off their seats simultaneously and you pictured that speed bump on the stage, you saw the other cars on the road and you saw more than 4 characters on stage but of course that was down to how smartly depicted and timed the scene was.

The use of staging was clever and wonderfully placed, the scene occurred centre stage. This allowed for the car to swerve, bump and jump all through the scene and all through your imagination. One of the most well timed scenes from the whole play was when the 4 characters arrived at a dead end blocked by sheep, one of the actors said "Look at all the mist" too which your mind responded with imagining the mist there, however: this time he repeated the line facing the wings and a small dribble of mist came onto stage from a machine.

At this point your imagination was given a break and you were able to enjoy classic, slapstick comedy as it should be: simple. I sadly felt that midway through the second half; the play lost its momentum, not completely but enough to make me lose the manic laugh that the first half hauled out of me. I felt as though the play left my imagination for dead and that I had to embrace non-stop cheesy gags. This was evident in the sewer scene where you had Hannah and his love interest trying to get through a gross place

whilst the two men tried too hard to get some laughs out of some physical theatre.

I sat there in disbelief that the play of such high quality had finally failed to even get a smirk out of me. I felt as though I was watching 4 friends not 4 actors which was a real shame. It took away the depth of the characters which allowed me to disengage from a realistic, witty and enjoyable play. A man was playing a trap on the tailor and when the woman walked over he covered his private area which got laughs from the audience but for a person who loves clever humor, I couldn't help but feel that the playwright had run out of ideas by that point, which is a real shame.