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More than 39 Reasons to Catch *The 39 Steps* at THEATRE THREE

by Barbara Anne Kirshner April 14, 2026

"Oh my God, what a masterpiece," exclaimed filmmaker and actor Orson Welles of Alfred Hitchcocks's fast-paced murder mystery *The 39 Steps* (1935). It was only a matter of time before this spine tingling film was adapted into a play that ingeniously mixes edge-of-your-seat suspense with a dash of Monty Python to produce the madcap treat now playing at Theatre Three in Port Jefferson.

This parody play was first written by Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon with the concept calling for the original Hitchcock film to be performed by a four-person cast. One actor plays the hero, Richard Hannay, an actress plays the three women with whom he has romantic entanglements, and two actors called the "Clowns" play about 150 different characters. This version opened in 1996 at the Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond, North Yorkshire, England. Patrick Barlow rewrote the play in 2005 with a premiere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse before moving to the Tricycle Theatre in London, then on to the Criterion Theatre. In all, the play ran for nine years in the West End, making it the fifth-longest running play in West End history.

Billed as *Alfred Hitchcock's The 39 Steps*, it opened on Broadway in a Roundabout Theatre Production at the American Airlines Theatre in January 2008. It transferred to the Cort Theatre in April 2008 and then to the Helen Hayes Theatre in January 2009. In 2010, the play moved to the off-Broadway venue New World Stages. In 2015 it resumed at the Union Square Theater and was retitled *39 Steps*.

This play, branded 'Hitchcock Made Hilarious,' won the Olivier Award for best comedy in 2007, the Drama Desk Award in 2008, two Tony Awards and it was nominated for four other Tony Awards.

The action packed plot takes place in 1935, London. Dashing leading man, Richard Hannay (Michael Limone), says to the audience, "I was bored. No, more than bored. Tired of the world and tired of – life, to be honest. And I thought, 'Who the bloody hell cares, frankly. What does it matter. No one would miss me. I wouldn't miss me. I could quite easily…'" He rethinks his despair and decides to go to the theater where he meets the mysterious German secret agent Annabella Schmidt who is fleeing a spy ring and takes a knife in her back in Hannay's apartment shortly after telling him about the "39 steps." This sets chaos in motion for Hannay who has much more to worry about aside from his "boring life."

Hannay becomes a fugitive on the run winding up in the remote highlands of Scotland pursued by the police and a murderous spy ring. Along the way, he meets up with Margaret, a young Scottish woman, and Pamela, with whom Hannay has a chance encounter on the train. Ashley Brooke Curtis plays all three women. The action builds thanks to the two "Clowns" (Jae Hughes and Dan Schindler) who portray numerous characters. This is the story of an ordinary man caught in a whirlwind of suspense with surprising twists and turns that lead to a chilling finale. References to Hitchcock films *North by Northwest*, *Rear Window*, *Strangers on a Train* and more are cleverly sprinkled in.

Theatre Three has whipped up delightful mayhem with *The 39 Steps*. Director Christine Boehm presides over this fast-paced, two-hour comedy and has assembled a cast quite up to the challenge of maintaining high energy amid all the hijinks, and they are quick change artists to boot.

Michael Limone is magnetic as the ordinary man, Richard Hannay, bored with his life but never imagining it would have such an immediate and diabolical twist. Limone is debonair with the sophistication and charm reminiscent of David Niven as he delivers his lines with a comedic flair accompanied by an ever-present mischievous glint in his eyes.

Ashley Brooke Curtis is adept at bringing to life Hannay's love interests Annabella Schmidt, Margaret and Pamela, making each distinctly different by changing accents, appearances and personalities. Curtis shifts from the mysterious German spy Annabella to the young, innocent Scottish girl, Margaret, to the sophisticated Londoner, Pamela, and we believe each transformation. Jae Hughes and Dan Schindler are responsible for a majority of the comedic action as the two "Clowns." With just a simple change of a hat, scarf or prop, they become villains, police officers, hotel keepers, newspaper boys and spies. A standout in the action is when Hughes takes on two different female character roles knocking it out of the park with hilarious high-pitched vocals and delicate movements while Schindler's character switches take us from kindly to sinister in a matter of seconds.

These roles call for nonstop physical comedy bordering on athletic agility. A special shout out goes to Hughes for an amazing juggling routine.

The technical team on this show must be as tight as the acting ensemble, as they are responsible for the frenetic pace from beginning to end. Randall Parsons' minimal set, replete with rolling pieces, easily morphs into different locations. Lighting design by Steve Barile, Jr. and sound design by Tim Haggerty adds definition and mood. Ronald Green III has crafted costumes that help the actors become the quick-change artists necessary in this show with a flip of a hat, a wig or a scarf. The sophisticated beige suit on Hannay defines his character, as does the different ensembles on Curtis that help her distinctly bridge from Annabella to Margaret to Pamela.

The 39 Steps has more than 39 reasons to rush over to Theatre Three for a roller coaster ride brimming with laughter and thrills.

Now through May 3.

Theatre Three is located at 412 Main Street, Port Jefferson. Call 631-928-9100 or visit ***theatrethree.com*** *for tickets and info.*

Barbara Anne Kirshner is a freelance journalist and photographer whose celebrity interviews, theatre reviews, features and human interest stories appear in major publications. She is author of the children's chapter book, Madison Weatherbee The Different Dachshund, Madison Weatherbee The Musical and a host of one-act plays that have been produced across Long Island.