

# ARIZONA THEATRE COMPANY

THE STATE THEATRE



## ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S THE 39 STEPS

Play Guide

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It is Arizona Theatre Company's goal to share the enriching experience of live theatre. This play guide is intended to help you prepare for your visit to Arizona Theatre Company. Should you have comments or suggestions regarding the play guide, or if you need more information about scheduling trips to see an ATC production, please feel free to contact us:

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# ARIZONA THEATRE COMPANY: WHO WE ARE

## Thousands of people make our work at ATC possible!

Arizona Theatre Company is a professional, not-for-profit theatre company. This means all of our artists, administrators and production staff are paid professionals, and the income we receive from ticket sales and contributions goes right back into our budget to create our work, rather than to any particular person as a profit.



Herberger Theatre in Phoenix, Arizona

Each season, ATC employs hundreds of actors, directors and designers from all over the country to create the work you see on stage. In addition, ATC currently employs about 100 staff members in our production shops and administrative offices in Tucson and Phoenix during our season. Among these people are carpenters, painters, marketing professionals, fundraisers, stage directors, computer specialists, sound and light board operators, tailors, costume designers, box office agents, stage crew -the list is endless- representing an amazing range of talents and skills.

We are also supported by a Board of Trustees, a group of business and community leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to assist the theatre in financial and legal matters, advise in marketing and fundraising, and help represent the theatre in our community.

Roughly 150,000 people attend our shows every year, and several thousands of those people support us with charitable contributions in addition to purchasing their tickets. Businesses large and small, private foundations and the city and state governments also support our work financially.

All of this is in support of our mission: to create professional theatre that continually strives to reach new levels of artistic excellence and that resonates locally, in the state of Arizona and throughout the nation. In order to fulfill its mission, the theatre produces a broad repertoire ranging from classics to new works, engages artists of the highest caliber, and is committed to assuring access to the broadest spectrum of citizens.



Temple of Music and Art in Tucson, Arizona

# Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*

Adapted by Patrick Barlow

From the novel by John Buchan

From the movie by Alfred Hitchcock

Directed by Joel Sass

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

Mix a Hitchcock masterpiece with a juicy spy novel, add a dash of Monty Python and you have ... Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*. A mind-blowing cast of four actors play over 150 characters in this fast-paced tale of an ordinary man on an extraordinarily entertaining adventure. The madness begins when mild-mannered Richard Hannay starts his evening at the theatre and ends the night with a dead body in his lap. Caught in a maze of murder, espionage and flirtatious entanglements, our hero careens from the British music hall to the moors of Scotland and back to the London Palladium in search of a plausible alibi and the true identity of the killer. Broadway's most intriguing, most riotous, most unmissable Tony-winning comedy smash proves that anything the movies can do, the theatre can do more hilariously!



Robert O. Berdahl, Luverne Seifert, Jim Lichtscheidl and Sarah Agnew in Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*. Credit Michal Daniel.

## SYNOPSIS



Actors Sarah Agnew and Luverne Seifer in Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*. Credit Michal Daniel.

Richard Hannay is at a London theatre, attending a demonstration of the remarkable powers of "Mr. Memory," a man with a photographic memory, when a fight breaks out and a shot is fired. In the ensuing panic, he finds himself holding a frightened Annabella Schmidt, who talks him into taking her back to his flat. There, she tells him that she is a spy, being chased by assassins, she claims to have uncovered a plot to steal vital British military secrets, implemented by a man who is the head of an espionage organization called "The 39 Steps."

The next day, Hannay wakes up to find her dead, stabbed with a knife. He sneaks out of the flat disguised as a milkman and takes a train to Scotland, where she has told him she was going to find the leader of the espionage group. On the train, he discovers that he is suspected in the murder of Annabella. He sees the police on his trail and in desperation he enters the nearest compartment; in an attempt to escape detection, he passionately kisses the sole occupant, the attractive Pamela. She however manages to free herself from his unwanted embrace and betrays him to the law. He jumps from the train and escapes.

He stays the night with a poor older farmer and his young wife who sees in Hannay the dashing, romantic man she longs for. The next morning, he leaves in the farmer's Sunday coat, and calls at the house of which Annabella told him. There he finds the man with part of his finger missing, the seemingly respectable Professor Jordan, who shoots Hannay and mistakenly leaves him for dead.

The fun continues as this frenetic farce careens from place to place and muddle to mess. The conclusion combines mishaps, mistaken identities, and tongue-in-cheek references to everything we like about murder mysteries and film noir detective movies.

-reprinted with permission from Utah Shakespearean Festival's study guide for Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*

## THE CHARACTERS

**Richard Hannay:** The leading man and investigator into the dastardly organization known as *THE 39 STEPS*.

**Annabella/Margaret/Pamela:** All the major female characters in the play (played by one actress).

**The Clowns:** Two actors who play, say, about 150 characters.



Actor Robert O. Berdahl who plays Richard Hannay in ATC's production



Actor Sarah Agnew who plays the major female roles in ATC's production

# BUCHAN

## JOHN BUCHAN

John Buchan was born in Perth, Scotland in August, 1875, the eldest son of John Buchan, a Calvinist Presbyterian minister, and Helen Masterson Buchan. Much of his future writing involved memories of what was a rather idyllic childhood: summers spent with his grandparents exploring their sheep farm, fairytales told by his father, and the creative encouragement of his uncle Willie. His early life was marred only by a carriage accident at the age of five that left permanent scars on his face. Buchan attended grammar school beginning in 1888 before receiving a scholarship to Glasgow University, where he began his writing career and helped finance his tuition by writing essays for the *Glasgow University Magazine*.

In 1895, Buchan travelled to England to study law at Brasenose College, Oxford University. He moved to London in 1900 to apprentice at law firms in the midst of the Boer War, deciding not to volunteer for military service. In 1902, at the end of the war, he accepted a position in South Africa as secretary to Lord Milner. There he wrote *The African Colony* in 1903 before returning to London and partnering with publisher Thomas Nelson. He married Susan Grosvenor in 1907, and their daughter Alice was born the next year. 1911 saw both the birth of their son, John Norman Stuart, and the first pains of Buchan's duodenal illness that would affect him for the rest of his life. While intermittently ill, Buchan began to become involved in politics and wrote a number of biographies during this period of his life, which proved to be a painful one. His brother, Willie, passed away in 1912 followed closely by a number of his friends and his brother Alistair when World War I broke out in 1914.



John Buchan as Governor-General of Canada



*The Thirty-Nine Steps* author John Buchan in 1936

In 1915, Buchan became a war correspondent for *The Times*, and wrote *Britain's War by Land* and his most famous thriller, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. He followed these works in 1916 with *Greenmantle* and *The Purpose of War*, and had two more sons, William in 1916 and Alistair in 1918. He became an officer for The Intelligence Corps in France until 1917, when he returned home for an operation from which he recovered for the next few years while continuing his political and literary endeavors. He was elected to Parliament in 1927, and was appointed

His Majesty's High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1933. In 1935, he was named First Baron Tweedsmuir of Enfield and appointed Governor-General of Canada, where he was well received by the populace.

In 1936, urged by his wife, who also authored several books, he created what would be the primary literary awards of Canada for many years, the Governor General's Awards. On September 9, 1939, he officially signed Canada's Declaration of War to enter World War II. In February of 1940, he fainted while shaving and suffered severe brain injuries. After three operations, he passed away at the Montreal Neurological Institute on February 11, 1940 at the age of 64. He was memorialized in both Canada and England, a much-loved political and literary figure on both sides of the Atlantic.

-written by Katherine Monberg, Artistic Intern

## ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Alfred Joseph Hitchcock was born on August 13, 1899, in Leytonstone, London, England, the third of three children to East End poulterer and greengrocer William Hitchcock and his wife Emma Jane Hitchcock. He was raised in a strict Roman Catholic family, and attended St. Ignatius College, London, and the University of London where he studied electrical engineering. Hitchcock's first foray into film began in 1915 as a title card designer for silent films for Paramount's Famous Players-Lasky Studio in London. While working there, his first directing opportunity came in 1923 when the director for the film *Always Tell Your Wife* fell ill, and Hitchcock jumped at the chance to complete the film. Impressed by his work, over the next few years the studio promoted Hitchcock to scenario writer, art director, and assistant director, which led to his official directorial debut with Gainsborough Film Studio's *The Pleasure Garden* in 1925. Some of his early work includes *The Lodger* (1925) and *Blackmail* (1930), Britain's first popular non-silent film.



Alfred Hitchcock

The 1930s brought Hitchcock international attention with such well-known thrillers as *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). In 1939, on the eve of World War II in Europe, Hitchcock moved with his wife, Alma, and their daughter, Patricia, to Hollywood, California. His American debut came with the film *Rebecca* (1940) starring Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine, winning Hitchcock an Academy Award for Best Picture. He followed his immediate American success with such acclaimed films as *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960). In 1955, he launched the television show

*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, catapulting him to iconic celebrity status. In 1979, Hitchcock was recognized by the American Film Institute with a Lifetime Achievement Award, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1980. Later that year, he passed away from renal failure in his sleep on April 28, 1980, leaving behind a vast filmography as one of the most influential film artists of the 20th century.

In a career spanning more than 50 years, Hitchcock created films that explored the complexity of human psychology, evoking menace and fear to develop the genre of the psychological thriller that he pioneered. His technical innovation was one of his greatest skills, demonstrating a mastery of sound and score, creative camera viewpoints, and ground-breaking editing techniques to heighten suspense and unsettle the audience. His plots are often based on similar themes, the most common being the wrongly accused innocent man forced to apprehend the criminal in order to clear his own name, the guilty woman who involves a male protagonist, or the psychopathic killer whose identity is revealed over the course of the film. His films usually involve murder or espionage, and frequently include mistaken identities, deceptions, and lively chase sequences to enhance the movie-going experience. He was particularly known for his meticulous planning and detailed storyboarding from which he would rarely deviate, and a reputed dislike of actors though he worked with some of the best talent of his day, their fame and his characteristic aesthetic created the lasting legacy of the unparalleled “Master of Suspense.”

-written by Katherine Monberg, Artistic Intern

## HOW Alfred Hitchcock's THE 39 STEPS CAME TO BE

*THE 39 STEPS* that finds its way to the ATC stage has a long and adaptive history behind it. The story was first conceived in novel form by Scottish author John Buchan. It was published in its entirety in October, 1915, after being presented serially in magazine form earlier that year (it has never been out of print since its original publication). It is the first of five Richard Hannay novels written by Buchan published over the next twenty years. The original novel was first adapted for film in 1935 by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll, and is largely regarded as one of Hitchcock's best “man on the run” films, as well as the best film version of the text created to date. Director Ralph Thomas undertook another film version of *The 39 Steps* in 1959, basing his work on the Hitchcock adaptation, which had several significant deviations from the novel. Then followed a 1979 film version directed by Don Sharp that returned to a closer representation of the novel – though still deviating significantly – and featuring the well-known image of



Actor Jim Lichtscheidl who plays one of the clowns in Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*

"One of the thrilling things about writing this was the challenge of putting an entire movie on stage – complete with train chases, plane crashes, shadowy murders, beautiful spies, trilbied heavies, dastardly villains with little fingers missing, not to mention some of the most iconic moments in the history of cinema. There is much opportunity for comedy and satire here. But it's also a love story. A man and woman who have never loved anyone, yet miraculously – through all the daredevil feats and derring-do – discover the beating of their own true hearts. That there's a reason to live and a reason to love. And above all a reason – as our hero (fired up by love through he doesn't know that's what it is yet) blissfully realizes in his passionately impromptu political speech – to look after each other and look after the world." – Patrick Barlow

Hannay clinging to the hands of Big Ben at the film's climax. In 1995, Nobby Dimon and Simon Corble of Midsommer Actors' Company in England created a theatrical version of *The 39 Steps*, combining elements from Buchan's novel and Hitchcock's film with one notable difference: the entire performance would consist of just four actors playing all of the many roles in the text.

The comic theatrical adaptation that has swept through the American theatre scene was adapted from Dimon and Corble's version by Patrick Barlow, the well-known co-founder of National Theatre of Brent (NTB), a British comedy act of a mock two-man theatre troupe. Patrick Barlow approached his adaptation of the piece with the idea that he would use the movie as inspiration while also making use of the book, but that he would change either when necessary to make the play work. The play is pastiche, which is defined by Webster's as "literary, artistic, musical, or architectural work that imitates the style of previous work." Barlow throws in allusions to other works of art, particularly other Hitchcock films. The comedy also comes from the fact that while one actor plays leading man Richard Hannay for the entirety of the script, one woman plays all of the female characters and two other actors (called Clown 1 and Clown 2) play over 150 other roles. Add to that the story calls for chase scenes, a jump from a moving train along with the requisite quick changes of costume necessary to pull the whole thing off, and you have a play that delights audiences due to the fact that the



Actors Jim Lichtscheidl and Robert O. Berdahl in Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS*. Credit Michal Daniel.

What is satire? Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines satire as: "A literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn" and/or "a trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly."



Actor Luverne Seifer who plays one of the clowns in *Alfred Hitchcock's The 39 Steps*.

artists involved have to think outside the box to make the whole thing work.

Barlow's adaptation premiered in England in 2005 and transferred to West End's Tricycle Theatre the following year. The show made its Broadway debut in 2008, garnering six Tony Award nominations, winning two – Best Lighting Design and Best Sound Design, as well as a Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience – before it closed in 2010. The appeal of the play lies with the heart of the story being intriguing, fun and fast-paced along with Barlow's clever way of achieving both the cinematic necessities on stage, and staying true to characters and their desires.

-written by Jenny Bazzell, Literary Manager  
and Katherine Monberg, Artistic Intern

## RICHARD HANNAY – THE JAMES BOND OF HIS DAY

Richard Hannay was one of the first modern spy-thriller heroes and, as such, has heavily influenced the genre. Today, considered in the light of mainstream espionage fiction, Hannay appears to be badly clichéd—although one could point out that this is not his fault as he was created well before his attributes became clichéd.

In terms of personality, for example, Hannay seems to be a stereotypical "strong, silent" Briton, combining the stereotype of the dour Scotsman with the "stiff upper lip" of an Englishman, along with a tough physique and a shrewd (although not brilliant) brain. He is daring and resourceful, too. In terms of plot, he is often forced to conduct his activities in breach of the law, causing him to be hunted by the police as well as the enemy. He falls in love with a beautiful (blonde) spy on his own side, which proves to be an awkward complication, and is often called upon to thwart the enemy in some evil plan certain to ruin Britain's war effort.

However, Hannay also displays some characteristics that sharply distinguish him from both later characters in adventure tales and the fiction writers that sought to imitate him. He narrates the stories and shows a much wider range of emotion than is usually expected from this kind of thriller hero. Nowhere near as hard-boiled as the detective of American

noir fiction, Hannay is dependent upon his friends and appears to be a religious man; like his author, he is Presbyterian.

He is also increasingly shown to be something of a philosopher; he does not dehumanize his enemy, and despite sharing some of the racial prejudices of his day, is open-minded towards Germans, pacifists, and similar demonized groups of the time. Most remarkably in contrast to more recent thriller heroes, however, Hannay finds it difficult to talk to women, suffering from months of nerves before declaring his love for Mary. Until she appears, he has no love interest (indeed, the first two books are tautly constructed, and in no way suffer from an absence of romance), and when puzzling over his love for Mary, he remarks: "You can't live my kind of life for forty years, wholly among men, and be any good at pretty speeches to women." Being ignorant of women, however, does not make him immature: he is in fact a sagacious and able judge of men, and unusually wise.

-www.wikipedia.com

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The hero of *The 39 Steps*, Richard Hannay, starts his adventure in London, the capital of both England and the United Kingdom. London is broken up into many districts and neighborhoods, each one with its own distinct culture, architecture, and industry. The theatre district, where Hannay lives, is called the West End, similar to Broadway in New York, and is in the wealthy Leicester (Less-ter) Square area. This fashionable neighborhood is on the north bank of the Thames (Temms) River, and is home to many of London's wealthiest citizens. After a long train ride, Hannay arrives in Alt-na-Shellach (Shell-ahck) in Guildford, Scotland. This small town is a few miles north of Perth, in the beautiful Perthshire county in central Scotland.



A modern photo of Leicester Square

### The British Empire

In the decades before WWII (1938-1945) the phrase "the sun never sets on the British Empire" was literally true. Canada, India, Australia, and parts of Africa and Latin America were under British rule. That meant that somewhere in the world, no matter what time it was in Britain, the sun was shining on a part of the British Empire. This was a time of great wealth and prosperity for the British people, and many of the people in their protectorates, colonies, and allied states immigrated to the island in the first half of the 20th century. It is partially because of these immigrants from all over the world that Britain has the diverse and vibrant culture it has today.



**THE 39 STEPS** takes place across England. However, England is just one of the many names for the region of Europe where Hannay goes on his adventure.

For example:

- England is a country located in the southeast of Britain.
- Britain is the entire island (not including Ireland).
- Great Britain is the political entity made up of England, Wales, and Scotland
- The United Kingdom (or the U.K.) is England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

Reproduced with permission from TheatreWorks Silicon Valley

## BRITAIN IN 1935

Alfred Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS* takes place in 1935. Just what was happening in the United Kingdom that year?

- February 26** ..... In Daventry, Robert Watson-Watt first demonstrates the use of radar.
- March 12** ..... Speed limit in built-up areas reduced to 30 m.p.h.
- May 6** ..... Silver Jubilee celebrations for King George V.
- May 31** ..... The driving test becomes compulsory.
- June 7** ..... Ramsay MacDonald retires; Stanley Baldwin takes over as Prime Minister.
- June 18** ..... Anglo-German Naval Agreement: Britain agrees to a German navy equal to 35% of her own naval tonnage.
- June** ..... Alfred Hitchcock's film *The 39 Steps* released in the U.K.
- July 12** ..... Rioting breaks out in Belfast following Orange parades; by the end of August, eight Protestants and five Catholics have been killed, hundreds injured and over 2,000 homes destroyed (almost all Catholic).
- July 30** ..... Allen Lane founds Penguin Books to publish the first mass market paperbacks in Britain.



King George V

- September 12**..... An underground explosion at North Gawber (Lidgett) colliery, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, kills nineteen.
- October**..... First steel produced from new works at Corby.
- October 8** ..... Clement Attlee is appointed as interim leader of the Labour Party in succession to George Lansbury.
- November 4** ..... Opening of Hornsey Town Hall, London, designed by Reginald Uren, the first major U.K. building in the International style.
- November 6** ..... Maiden flight of the Royal Air Force's Hawker Hurricane fighter aircraft.
- November 14**..... In the General Election, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin is returned to office at the head of a National Government led by the Conservative Party with a large but reduced majority.
- November 26**..... –In the Labour Party leadership election, Clement Attlee is confirmed as leader.  
– Release of *Scrooge*, the first all-talking full-length film version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with Sir Seymour Hicks in the title role.
- December 10**..... James Chadwick wins the Nobel Prize in Physics for the discovery of the neutron.

-modified from [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)



A modern photo of Hornsey Town Hall



A World War II era Royal Air Force Hawker Hurricane

## BRITISH DIALECTS

Accents play a large role in *THE 39 STEPS* – it is one of the ways the two Clowns distinguish one person from another as they switch rapidly between two or more characters simultaneously. Although the U.S. and the U.K. share the same language, it is not always easy for one side to know what the other is saying. Some words are pronounced differently and others have come to mean different things over time. Below are some words that are pronounced differently or have a different meaning depending on where you live.

**American**

apartment  
 beach  
 bill (money)  
 candy  
 chips  
 cookie  
 cord (electrical)  
 counterclockwise  
 dessert  
 drugstore  
 elevator  
 first floor  
 french fries  
 garters  
 gasoline  
 intermission  
 package  
 perfume  
 radio  
 realtor  
 restroom  
 stroller  
 subway  
 suspenders  
 sweater  
 trunk  
 undershirt  
 vacation  
 vest  
 wrench  
 yard

**British**

flat  
 seaside  
 banknote  
 sweets  
 crisps  
 biscuit  
 flex  
 anticlockwise  
 pudding  
 chemist's  
 lift  
 ground floor  
 chips  
 suspenders  
 petrol  
 interval  
 parcel  
 scent  
 wireless  
 estate agent  
 lavatory or loo  
 pram  
 underground  
 braces  
 jumper  
 boot  
 vest  
 holiday  
 waistcoat  
 spanner  
 garden



"Dessert" or "Pudding." Whatever you call it, it's delicious.



"A-loo-min-um" or "al-u-min-ee-um" foil. You decide.

**American**

aluminum: a-loo-min-um  
 apricot: ah-pricot  
 charade: char-ay-d  
 cordial: corjul  
 filet: filay  
 herb: 'erb  
 medicine: med-i-sin  
 missile: miss-ul  
 leisure: leezhure  
 privacy: pry-vacy  
 schedule: skedule  
 semi: sem-eye  
 strychnine: strick-9  
 tomato: tom-ay-do

**British**

al-u-min-ee-m  
 ay-pri-cot  
 char-ah-d  
 cordee-al  
 fill-it  
 herb  
 med-sin  
 miss-aisle  
 lezhure  
 pri-vacy  
 shed-ule  
 sem-ee  
 strich-noon  
 tom-ah-to

Reproduced with permission from TheatreWorks Silicon Valley



US: Vest. UK: Waistcoat.

# WHAT IS FARCE?

"I have not yet seen any definition of Farce, and dare not be the first that ventures to define it. I know not what Fate it happened (in common Notion) to be the contemptible sort of Drama." – Nahum Tate, Poet Laureate of England, 1693

"Although perpetually scorned by those who would confine our vision to loftier things, traditional farce has maintained its popularity by unashamedly exploiting our most basic and primitive emotions. It is not afraid to use simple and universal images to reach us at this most elemental of levels, where our responses are strong, automatic, and virtually instinctive. Pratfalls and sudden blows, frantic chases, and lost trousers are all images to which we react almost without the intervention of thought. They are humiliation. Farce is not limited to such things, but because it is alone in its acceptance of them, they have become its most distinctive and obvious feature. They are basic to farce not because farce is crude and physical, but because it is shameless. It freely accepts all that we dislike, fear, and censor in ourselves. It includes our elementary responses to violence and sex, our basic bodily needs and functions, although it is capable of going well beyond them. It permits us to look at aspects of our lives that we cannot yet bear to view both seriously and honestly. It allows us to acknowledge the baser side of ourselves, our laws, and our institutions, and lets us admit how much lower than the angels we really are."

- From Manuel A. Esteban's *Georges Feydeau*.

## The History of Farce

### Ancient Greece and Rome

Farce is typically traced back to Ancient Greek and Roman playwrights such as Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence and Menander. Elements of farce such as stock characters with exaggerated behaviors as well as implausible situations often came together in comedic plays of the Greek and Roman era. Much Greek and Roman farce were often satirical in nature and poked fun at the day-to-day lives and figures that inhabited the worlds of the playwrights. One of the most famous ancient farces is *Lysistrata*, but others include *The Birds*, *The Clouds* and *The Wasps*.



A modern bust showing Aristophanes and Menander, masters of the old and new comedies, respectively.

## Medieval Era

During the Middle Ages, designated in European history as the roughly thousand year span from the time of the fall of the Roman Empire until the Renaissance, drama focused extensively on religion. The Catholic Church frowned upon all forms of drama because the official view was that theatre mocked God's creations and therefore should not be practiced by Christians. However, when faced with a largely illiterate population the church turned to drama including mystery, miracle and passion plays, which dealt with Biblical stories, saints' lives and the crucifixion of Jesus, respectively. The goal of these types of medieval drama was to teach morality lessons from the Bible to a population unlearned in Latin, and humor was not the principle technique employed. Fifteenth century morality plays such as *Everyman* taught of the vanity of earthly pursuits compared to the more important heavenly focus that the Church wanted to espouse. Particularly in the early Medieval Period, comedy of any type was discouraged; however, farce did make appearances in occasional plays such as the oldest surviving French farce titled *The Boy and the Blind Man* (13th century). Later in the era, the blending of morality plays and farce became more common over time. Comedic scenes also made their way into serious plays as "interludes" in church plays. The actual term "farce" was first applied to such scenes which involved simple, comedic situations and horseplay. Farce also made a re-appearance in the festivals of the era in what came to be known as The Feast of Fools. This popular festival included a temporary upending of traditional order in which people selected from amongst themselves to play the "roles" of high ranking church archbishops, abbots, etc. and parodied them. The farcical elements caused the festivals to be officially decried by the Church, but they remained popular throughout Europe for centuries.

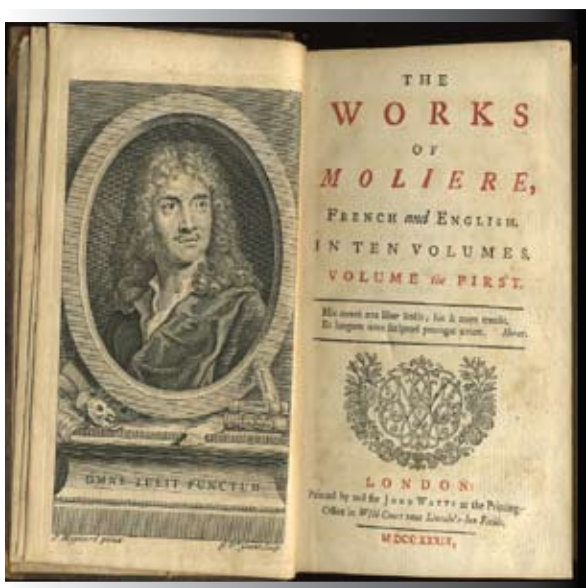


The first page of a printed edition of *Everyman* c. 1500

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines **farce** as: "a light dramatic composition marked by broadly satirical comedy and improbable plot" or "a savory stuffing."

## Elizabethan Period

During the Renaissance, authors, artists, philosophers and politicians were all re-examining interest in the classical era. During this time frame, theatre re-emerged as an entertainment separate from the Church (but certainly not outside the realm of the Church's disapproval). Plays were increasingly thought of as either comedies or dramas. During the era, farce was a popular form of comedy; William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* came from an adaptation of Plautus's *Brothers Manaechmi*. The re-introduction of classical works as adaptations during the era proved what classical audiences had already known – that the universal human stories told by the ancient farce writers continued to have appeal to people a thousand years later who spoke a completely different language. The implausible and funny situations and characters still humored audiences despite the gaps in location and time period in which the original basic stories were created.



A 1739 First Edition of Molière's works translated into English.

him stand out in the history of theatre. For instance, his play *Tartuffe* concentrates the playwright's satirical powers on religious hypocrites. His plays are still popular today and oft-performed despite the intervening centuries because his astute eye and sense of humor translates to modern audiences with little difficulty.

## The 17th Century

Say the word “farce” and many people immediately think of playwright Jean-Baptiste Poquelin known by his stage name of Molière. During the 17th century, this French playwright mastered and re-imagined the farce in a way that had not been seen since the classical era. Molière's masterpieces include *Le Misanthrope* (*The Misanthrope*), *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*), *Tartuffe ou L'Imposteur*, (*Tartuffe or the Hypocrite*), *L'Avare* (*The Miser*), *Le Malade imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Invalid*) and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (*The Bourgeois Gentleman*). His style was to skewer the world around him through his plays, concentrating on figures and archetypes well-known to Parisians of his day. His focus on creating comedies of manners and using farce for social critique make

## The 18th Century

During the 18th century, French writer Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais continued the development of the French farce through his plays *Le Barbier de Séville*, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and *La Mère coupable*. The plays told of the wild adventures of barber Figaro. *Le Barbier de Séville* was first produced in 1775, and its sequel gained notoriety by being banned by the king from 1781 to 1784 (when King Louis XVI finally gave in). The monarch's complaint was the treatment of the aristocracy in the play; however, when it finally played before an audience (including noblemen) the play was well-received. The final Figaro play was produced in 1792. The characters in the trilogy are reminiscent of earlier stock characters and the situations implausible, but like Moliere's plays, satiric.



An 1879 poster for a production of *The Comedy of Errors*



Keystone Kops from 1914 film *In the Clutches of the Gang*

## The 19th and Early 20th Centuries

Farce as a genre flourished during the 19th and 20th centuries. Farcical writers such as Georges Feydeau and W.S. Gilbert were immensely popular in their respective countries of France and England. Feydeau is perhaps best remembered for his classic *La Puce à l'oreille* (*A Flea in Her Ear*), but he wrote numerous beloved and much-adapted farces as well. W.S. Gilbert (with partner Arthur Sullivan) is responsible for some of the most beloved musical farces of the all time, including *The Pirates of Penzance*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Patience*,

and *The Mikado* but also wrote at least 22 plays. Lesser known to modern audiences, great farce writer Eugène Marin Labiche wrote such great works as *Célimare le bien-aimé* (1863), *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon* (1860), *La Grammaire*, *Un Pied dans le crime*, and *La Cagnotte* (1864). British writer Arthur Wing Pinero wrote very popular (though rarely revived today) plays such as *The Schoolmistress* (1866), *The Magistrate* (1885), *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895) and *Trelawny of the 'Wells'*.

By the early 20th century, farce had moved into silent films and then talkies with instances such as the films of Charlie Chaplin, the Keystone Kops, and later the Marx Brothers and the Three Stooges.

## The Mid 20th Century to the Present

With the explosion of television into households in the 1950s, shows such as *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* kept farce alive with their zany characters and physical comedy. These situation comedies (or sit-coms for short), moved farce away from just being a theatrical and film medium. With the advent of improv comedy shows such as *Saturday Night Live*, elements of farce continued to be displayed in popular culture. In today's world farce still exists in various forms, including new translations and adaptations of classic farces, but perhaps classic farce's most apparent descendent is found on television and in movies. Farcical television shows with stock comedic characters from the past such as *Three's Company* gave way to shows like *Roseanne* and, in more modern television, *Frasier*, *Arrested Development* and *The Big Bang Theory*. Through their exaggerated situations and characters, modern films such as *The Hangover* and *Bridesmaids* trace their roots back all the way to ancient Greece and Rome.

## COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE AND LAZZI

The physical comedy in *The 39 Steps* traces its roots back hundreds of years to Italy in the 1500s and *commedia dell'arte*. Troupes of travelling performers would typically move about the Italian countryside, putting on impromptu shows in each town they visited. These performances employed stock characters and mask work to tell stories. Throughout these stories, performers would insert a *lazzi* (pronounced "lat-si"). According to scholar Luigi Riccobani, *lazzi* are "the actions of Arlecchino or other masked characters when they interrupt a scene by their expressions of terror or by their fooleries" (*Histoire Du Theatre Italien*). In other words, *lazzi* are short comedic scenes that often had no correlation to the original story. For example, a *lazzi* might be one of the characters pretending to be a statue, only moving when the other performers on stage have their backs turned. These short scenes were often performed without words, the actors using broad, over-exaggerated physicality to convey the story.

Japan developed farce plays around the same time that Italy developed *commedia dell'arte*. These plays are called *Kyōgen*, and provide comedic relief during Noh plays.

This same kind of comedy can be seen in *The 39 Steps*. The two Clowns, more than 40 roles each throughout the show (often more than one character at a time) use specific, exaggerated physicality to become each character. The characters they create then interact with each other (and the other two performers) in short scenes. For example, the clowns play Mr. and Mrs. McGarrigle as well as Heavy 1 and Heavy 2 simultaneously. These four characters have a scene together, meaning the actors must switch accents, costumes, ages and even genders between lines. By making these characters larger than life, these switches are manageable and believable for the audience and add to the stylized nature of the show.

### Examples of stock characters:



Arlecchino



Il Capitano



Pantalone

- **Arlecchino** was the most famous. He was an acrobat and wit, childlike and amorous. He wore a cat-like mask and motley colored clothes and carried a bat or wooden sword. His movements are often associated with a cat or monkey.
- **Brighella**, Arlecchino's crony, was more roguish and sophisticated, a cowardly villain who would do anything for money. His movements are similar to a rat.
- **Il Capitano** (the captain) was a caricature of the professional soldier – bold, swaggering, and cowardly. He is often compared to a peacock.
- **Il Dottore** (the doctor) was a caricature of learning – pompous and fraudulent. His movements are often associated with a pig.
- **Pantalone** was a caricature of the Venetian merchant, rich and retired, mean and miserly, with a young wife or an adventurous daughter. His movements are often associated with a chicken or a crab.
- **Pulcinella**, as seen in the English Punch and Judy shows, was a dwarfish humpback with a crooked nose, the cruel bachelor who chased pretty girls. His name means “little chicken” and his movements are often chicken or toad-like.

In *commedia dell'arte*, female characters didn't wear masks, but instead wore colorful, beautiful dresses.

- Reproduced with permission from TheatreWorks Silicon Valley



Brighella



Il Dottore



Pulcinella

# PASTICHE

Pastiche is a work of literature, art, music, or architecture that is a type of homage to a previous work through stylistic imitation, or a work pieced together from multiple sources and thus imitative in nature. The word is Italian in origin, derived from a word meaning “medley” and is a reference to a type of dessert comprised of a mixture of items. In the literary sense, it is a facet of postmodernism that utilizes familiar styles, concepts and/or characters in new or amusing ways. Pastiche is closely related to parody, and is particularly suited for comic irony and satire as demonstrated by popular modern examples such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and the musical parodies of Weird Al Yankovic. Other contemporary examples include *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire, *The Eyre Affair* by Jasper Fforde, and the recent upsurge in fanfiction, stories written by fans that utilize characters from popular works of literature such as *Harry Potter* and *The Twilight Saga*.

-written by Katherine Monberg, Artistic Intern



Singer Weird Al Yankovic

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### Discussion Questions

*The 39 Steps* has been described as a pastiche, which is a work of drama, literature, art or music that imitates the work of a previous artist. What previous works is this play satirizing or imitating? Can you think of modern examples of pastiche in popular entertainment?

Richard Hannay is one of the first heroes of the spy thriller genre, and some have described him as the “James Bond” of his day. Do you agree with this comparison? What are some characteristics Hannay exhibits that make him Bond-like? How does he differ from the typical male action hero?

What was the reasoning behind having about 250 characters or so played by only two actors? How did this affect the action of the play?

What was the secret that Mr. Memory revealed at the end?

The novel was written and set in 1915, but the film and play are set in 1935. Why do you think this is? Do you think the play/film would have had to change much from the original novel to be set 20 years later?

Looking at the three main women in the play, what role did they have in moving the story forward? Did they affect Hannay's actions? If so, how?

### Language Arts Activities

Scottish author Paul Buchan wrote the novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in 1915 while he was a war correspondent; Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptation and this play are both set in 1935. Research some of the plot differences between Buchan's novel and Hitchcock's film. Write an essay that explores how events in Europe between 1915 and 1935 led to the genesis of the spy thriller genre, and explain why Hitchcock may have chosen to contemporize his film adaptation of Buchan's novel.

Write an essay describing how and why Richard Hannay's attitude and actions evolve throughout the course of the play.

In *comedia dell'arte* there are six *clown* stock characters that are explained in this play guide. Compare the stock characters to the clown characters that you saw in *THE 39 STEPS*. How many are represented in this play? Explain, giving examples.

In Film Noir the classic female protagonist was referred to as the "femme fatale". Research this archetype. How do the female characters from *THE 39 STEPS* adhere to or differ from the classic femme fatale archetype? Discuss, using examples.

Alfred Hitchcock was described as the "master of suspense". Write a brief essay on Hitchcock's style and technique and how he impacted the genre of psychological thriller.

### Theatre Arts Activities

In a short essay, identify and describe the various theatrical conventions used to convey setting in this play. Is the play presentational or representational? What role does the audience have in creating the world of the play?

Physical comedy can be important to a piece of farcical theatre. The two Clowns in *THE 39 STEPS* play dozens of characters, sometimes in the same scene. Make a list of five of the characters played by one of those actors. Identify some of the physical characteristics or behaviors the actor used to create each of those characters. As part of a character walk exercise, walk around the room for a minute as one of the characters. See how quickly you can switch from one character's walk to the next by making changes in your body language, posture, speed, and physicality.

Farce is described as permitting us “to look at aspects of our lives that we cannot yet bear to view both seriously and honestly.” Research the techniques of farce, then think back to a moment in your life that may not have been amusing at the time, but that you can now laugh about. Recreate this moment in a farcical short scene.

In film, storyboarding is used to provide a visual layout of events as they are to be seen through the camera lens. Think through *THE 39 STEPS*, and decide on ten integral moments of the play that were essential to plot development. Draw storyboards for those moments to create a visual overview of the play. Now re-create each one of these moments in a series of tableaux, or frozen images that you create with your bodies instead of paper and pen.