

Hartford Stage, Hartford, CT

The Mousetrap, by Agatha Christie. Directed by Jackson Gay.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

In November *The Mousetrap* will have been running in London for 70 years. I have seen it nine times, including twice in the West End, and each time the ending takes me by surprise. It remains the best thriller on stage ever. Now it's in Hartford. You must see it. Christie demands it.



The Company; Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Director Jackson Gay has taken a young company, imbued them with period style - the play is set in 1947, and lets them take the play to new, comic heights. That's odd because a major character is murdered on stage at the end of the first act and this is the second murder in the play. The story deals with a tragedy: three children whose lives are destroyed, and vengeance forced out of that scenario. In Christie-style there are maguffins, misleading evidence that are both intriguing and confusing. And like she always did, the play pulls you in directions you don't expect to go and near the end of it chills run up your spine.

In a cast of eight, most of whom are suspects or should be, there are no real stand-outs. Every actor does his or her best and they give us believable characters which is part of Christie's master plan.



Jason O'Connell (front),
Sam Morales and Tobias Segal (back);
Photo: T. Charles Erickson.

Sam Morales and Tobias Segal are the Ralstons, owners of Monkswell Manor, the stately old house, now a Bed and Breakfast where the incidents of the play occur. It is winter, it has been snowing and they and their guests, including the mysterious stranger (a Christie staple) Mr. Paraqvicini (played by Jason O'Connell) are snowed in. They are joined by by Detective Sergeant Trotter (played by Brendan Dalton) who cross-country skis to the estate with concerns about a London murderer and his belief that the killer may be among the Ralstons' guests. Christopher Geary plays Christopher Wren, a student of architecture who seems fascinated by the manor and its history. He is also decidedly gay and very attracted to the handsome detective. An older woman, Mrs. Boyle, snooty and unsentimental has come for a weekend away from home. Played by Yvette Ganier she is most obnoxious and unpleasant, a perfect Christie character. A younger woman, Miss Casewell, played by Ali Skamangas, with lesbian characteristics and a retired military figure, Major Metcalf, played by Greg Stuhr flesh out the company and with their own hidden secrets fulfill the Christie manifesto of "keep it interesting-something for everyone." They are all well-played and maintain our interest and fascination with details as per Dame Agatha's wishes.

To delve into plot and storyline would do you a disservice. It is a mystery, a classic British "whodunnit" and even a small spoiler could destroy the experience for you. I will just say that playwright, actors and director give this play what it needs and turn the proceedings into one grand show. They will keep you guessing, keep you alert and, we hope, alive for the two and a half hours it takes to resolve conflicts and enjoy this anniversary production.



Christopher Geary and Sam Morales (front),
Tobias Segal (back); Photo: T. Charles Erickson.

Riw Rakkulchon's superb complex set will hold your interest as much as the cast will. Perfectly lit by Krista Smith the people look wonderful in their costumes designed by Fabian Fidel Aguilar. Jackson Gay keeps the whole thing whole and never tips Christie's hat, until the final moments that is, when the author mandates hat-tipping. This is just plain, old-fashioned, good theatre. Good show!!

+ 10/22/2022 +

The Mousetrap plays at Hartford Stage, 50 Church Street, Hartford, CT through November 6. For information and tickets go to www.HartfordStage.org or call 860-527-5151.