

Majestic Theater, West Springfield, MA
THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG, by Henry Lewis, Henry Shields and Jonathan Sayer,
. Directed by Stephen Petit .Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“It’s all bluff and bluster.”

Farce isn’t easy. true farce is glorious in its silliness. There has never been a farce, never been a play, quite like *“The Play That Goes Wrong.”* Imagine, if you will, an Agatha Christie murder mystery played by a troupe of amateur actors in a small town on a stage that houses a lovely set that - when push comes to shove - reveals al of its flaws, all of its amateur construction, all of its worst qualities. As you watch the play being played by this group of non-pros you get to see every mistake ever made in a play played by earnest actors doing their best to give a good show, in spirte of themselves and their shortcomings. This is farce and it is truly hilarious, an old-fashioned laugh-riot that you just have to see. . especially the large dog who helps facilitate the ending of the play within the play.



Josh Karam, Weston Pytek, Scott Renzoni, Elizabeth Pietrangelo,
Shaun O’Keefe; Photo: Kait Rankins

Charles Haversham is dead, murdered. His fiancé, the lovely Florence Colleymoore, is having an affair with Charles’ brother Cecil. Her brother Thomas is insanely jealous; old Perkiins, the butler, is just incompetent and Inspector Carter understands what secrets are and how to deal with them. The assistant stage manager can read in parts when needed and the official stage manager just does what she does. Put them all together and what do you have but the ideal characters for this murder mystery farce. What they do and what happens to them is the heart of the play and if the hear could give out with a guffaw, it would, and in my case is often did. This is my fifth time at a performance of this rowdy comedy and I

laughed just as hard and long as I did the first time I saw it on Broadway. It is that good a show and this is exactly as wonderful a production as any I’ve seen in the past.

The Majestic Theater's program follows the specifics of the playwrights. The characters' names are the names of the players and not the names of those characters they are playing in "*The Murder at Haversham Manor.*" They are never referred to by their actual character names so I will tell you who they are, and who they play and who they actually are in real life so you won't be as confused as the people in the row in front of me. Jonathan (played by Weston Pytel) plays the dead man Charles Haversham. Sandra (played by Elizabeth Pietrangelo) plays his fiancé Florence Colleymore, Max (played by Scott Renzoni) is her lover Cecil. Annie, the assistant stage manager (played by Mariko Iwasa) is the standby Florence. Robert (played by Shaun O'Keefe) takes the part of Thomas Colleymoore. Chris (played by Jack Grigoli) is both Inspector Carter and the head of the Drama Society.. Dennis (played by Josh Karam) plays Perkins, the butler.

Trevor, the stage manager (played by Liv Cunha) does the rest. There isn't a clinker in the company. They all perform with clarity and with that Maggie Smith-like British precision and correctness even when they can't. **Warning:** There are many difficult accidents throughout the play which may strike you as hurtful, but the cast is so good at them that the only pain comes when the laughter of the audience doesn't.



Mariko Iwasa, Shaun O'Keefe, Jack Grigoli, and Josh Karam;
Photo: Kait Rankins

Especially good are Renzoni, Iwasa, Grigoli, O'Keefe, and Karam. They are absorbed into the characters their characters play, a wholehearted vision of amateur actors playing emotionally frustrated characters. Iwasa is very funny indeed reading her script as she replaces Sandra in the role of Florence (at times there are three different Florences on stage). Renzoni, as the amorous brother, is hilarious and when he is murdered too, he disappears only to reappear as another character entirely. He is terrific. Grigoli and O'Keefe have to grapple with a failing, collapsing set and Karam plays the butler as a semi-literate, quasi-cognizant servant with aging problems. These are wonderful actors in difficult multi-layered roles in a rapidly played farce that give them little opportunity to be anything but funny. Yet they manage a semblance of staged reality.



Jack Grigoli, Mariko Iwasa, Weston Pytel, Liv Cunha, Shaun O'Keefe, Elizabeth Pietrangelo Scott Renzoni; Photo: Kait Rankins

Sandra is the first actor struck down in mid-act. Her assisted exit is hilarious and later on the same accident takes Annie out of the show. When the play goes wrong here the play goes right to the heart of the matter, and keeping the plot alive is the job of the team on stage. How they handle things is more than half of the fun.

Director Stephen Petit has put together a classic edition of this show. He has upheld every laugh and maintained the strange suspense of the lengthy ending. The set has been designed by Peter Colao (and constructed by Wooden Kinvi Productions in Waltham, MA) and it does everything that an actively acting set can do. The hilarious lighting design was created by Daniel D. Rist. The show's 1922 costumes and the more contemporary ones were designed by the very talented Dawn McKay. The show is run and held together by stage manager Hope Rose Kelly who deserves a medal for keeping this show up and running from day to day. I almost missed this opportunity to indulge myself in the light and heavy humor of "The Play That Goes Wrong." Don't you do the same - get your tickets quickly!

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The Play That Goes Wrong plays at the Majestic Theater, 131 Elm Street, West Springfield through June 2. For information and tickets go to info@majestictheater.com or call the box office at (413) 747-7797.