

## The 39 Steps

By John Buchan and Alfred Hitchcock, adapted by Patrick Barlow

Alton Fringe Theatre

Amery Hill Drama Studio

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012

**G**o and see the next Alton Fringe Theatre Production, whatever it is! By the time you're reading this the show will have finished its run, so you will just have to make sure you are first in the queue for tickets for the next show. Once again AFT come up with the goods in a barnstorming version of this comic adaptation by Patrick Barlow enhancing their reputation for great entertainment whether in serious or comedic form. A real shame it had a relatively short run and that even more people didn't get to see it, ah such is the lot of 'am dram'. But there was nothing amateur about the production values, there was the usual AFT attention to detail and strong performances. Thankfully, as befits this adaptation there was plenty of 'ham' on offer for the hungry punter, served deliciously thick with a saucy, spicy relish by a cast who know how to play comedy perfectly straight with the odd wicked glance and grin to garnish the feast.

The Fringe were at their inventive best, thanks to the directors Barbara Rayner and Louise Dilloway, making a virtue out of minimalism, so we were transported from London apartment to the wilds of Scottish moorland via train, plane & car without the need for naturalistic sets. Instead, picture foggy moorland suggested by helium filled balloons or a train compartment realised by the simple use of benches and great movement from the actors. And the hilarious chase across the 'Forth Bridge' brought to life by the actors and some red elasticated tape, with the brilliant touch of someone 'painting' one end of the bridge.

Playing multiple parts the cast were able to show off their versatility which added to the comedy – male and female actors switching genders, always a good comic device and the Fringe did it superbly. Tim Guilding and Sarah Castle-Smith were consummate performers of the art of the quick switch and pushed the stereotypes without losing any subtlety they set up and played the gags in the

great tradition of Morecambe & Wise. Other members of the cast, James Willis, Heather Davies, Ian Dussek, David Rae, Penny Cushing, Chris Chappell and Alison de Ledesma put in such convincing performances which lifted the action and made each moment compelling and funny. Jo Foulkes played Annabella Schmidt with the most 'wediculous' German accent, smouldering perfectly with comic intrigue. Hannah Brown as the sophisticated and haughty Pamela played the part beautifully and was the perfect foil to Hannay played by Chris Lang. Hats off to Lang, for a great interpretation of the somewhat down at heel, gentleman type Hannay who, on the lookout for excitement in a seemingly boring life, stumbles across a fascist plot against Britain and somehow through many twists and comic turns, manages to foil the plot...hurrah!

**T**his production couldn't have been any more different from the previous two superb Fringe offerings which challenged us intellectually and morally. With *The 39 Steps* here was the Fringe showing how versatile they are and giving us an evening of pure entertainment ...thank you.

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