

I spy with my little eye, fantastic four at work

Players continue 70th anniversary season with comic caper

By RICHARD HOWARTH
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I can't remember when I first saw the wonderful Hitchcock take on *The 39 Steps* – despite rumours, I wasn't around for the premiere – and it remains an all-time favourite film.

That said, I never expected it to end up on the stage but fell in love the first time I saw a touring production at Northampton's Royal theatre in 2008.

At that point it was fresh from winning the Olivier Award for best new comedy of 2007 and was on its way to taking over the world.

Since then I've seen it on tour again and at its spiritual home at The Criterion, never tiring of its madcap creation.

So it was a delight to discover Banbury Cross Players were taking up the challenge of bringing it to The Mill as part of the group's 70th anniversary season.

While some plays are obvious picks for amateur groups, *The 39 Steps* represents a great challenge for the four main actors who play multiple roles, while also demanding a big commitment from the rest of the company to produce the props and allow the drama to flourish on stage.

So in keeping with the ac-



A murder is announced...

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It may be a comedy and there may be plenty of physicality but there are still may lines and, of course, many personalities to portray – male and female, good and bad, from London to the wilds of

Scotland and back again.

The dialogue remains close to the Hitchcock film but the way every drop of comedy is drawn from every word and situation is testament to the genius of the adaptation.

So while these four deserve the plaudits for a job well done, there was also deserved applause for all those who worked so hard to make it possible, most obviously

the sound effects orchestra, a team of four who brought to life every dramatic moment.

A show like this is all about the pace and overall the Players got it spot on, moments like the crazy Forth Bridge scene balancing out with the gentler moments in the hotel room.

It was a brave choice but a sign that this group is in fine health for the next 70 years.

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The 39 Steps Review By RICHARD HOWARTH richard.howarth@jpress.co.uk 01295 227785
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