



Audio Description Pre-Show Notes: The 39 Steps

Note: This performance contains strobe lighting that may affect photosensitive patrons, and sudden loud sound effects.

Prepare to be taken back in time into the black and white world of an Alfred Hitchcock film; conspiracies, spies, and mayhem. Think of heroes, the mysterious love interest, the secretive villains and the comedic, loveable sidekicks.

This show has it all, plus much more!

The Venue

This play will be staged in the Drama Theatre, one of the Opera House's smaller theatres which is located in the Western Foyer on the ground floor of the Sydney Opera House.

The Western Foyer is shared between the Playhouse, Studio, and Drama Theatre. Stretching along one side of the narrow space is a long wall with many large glass windows and doors leading outside to the paved Forecourt and the water's edge.

Along the opposite wall of the Foyer are the entrance doors to these theatres, as well as a Bar and Café, a Box Office counter to collect tickets from, and a Cloak Room counter where you can leave any coats or bags for the duration of the performance. There are toilets at either end of the Foyer, including an accessible option at both locations.

The Drama Theatre is entered from the back and has 540 seats arranged in 19 straight, continuous rows sloping down toward the stage. The concrete walls are painted black, the floor is carpeted in a deep blue, and the chairs are made of a white birch wood with orange upholstery.

The Set

The set takes us into the monochromatic world of an old black and white film.

We go to many different locations in the show, as protagonist Richard Hannay tries to evade his enemies through England and Scotland in the 1930s. These locations include a living room, a train carriage, a cottage in the Scottish countryside, a theatre and a hotel.

These are created with simple set pieces and furniture, with a white cloth at the back of the stage to project backdrops or images onto. Objects and people can also be placed behind this white cloth screen to create shadowy silhouettes that become part of these backdrop scenes.

The set pieces are often at sharp wide angles to create the illusion of the set being in a 2D film, while in reality they are 3D. The set pieces stay close to the back of the stage on low moving platforms so there is more space at the front for the actors.

Black panels frame the set, looking similar to old celluloid film squares with white borders.

There are two panels in front of the set pieces that move sideways like sliding doors. The panels can come completely to the centre and meet, or stop part-way across to create different spaces.

The Lighting

Lighting plays a big part in the show. Crisp angles and single spotlights create the illusive and moody shadows best associated with the old Hitchcock movies.

Often in theatre, great care is taken to make sure that the whole actor is lit anywhere on the stage; however, for this show, the shadows are encouraged.

The Cast and Characters

There are four actors in the show, who must somehow play 130 different characters between them! All but one of the actors will play multiple characters by changing hats, costumes and voices to convey different people.

The costumes and makeup also add to the illusion of an old black and white Hollywood movie, being made up of black, white and grey.

White makeup gives the actors pasty white skin, with accented facial features created using dark shadows and eyeliner. The makeup is similar to that of a mime character or vaudeville performer.

Richard Hannay

Richard Hannay is the leading man, the brave hero, the one to solve the puzzle! He is played by Ian Stenlake and is a slender, middled-aged man. He has short grey hair, speckled with

brown and slicked back in a side part. He has a grey/brown pencil moustache and piercing blue eyes.

Hannay wears the same clothes throughout the show: a light grey suit, white shirt and grey tie. He has a matching light grey trilby hat and wears black and white wing-tip brogues.

The Femme Fatale

Lisa McCune plays the three love interests and accomplices of Richard Hannay during the play. She is a petite, slim built woman with blonde hair, in her mid-50s.

Annabella Schmidt is a seductive German blonde who pulls Hannay into the web of secrets. She wears a full-length, fitted silver evening gown with a corset top and a skirt that flares out in a mermaid style. She has a beaded silver capelet around her shoulders and silver elbow-length gloves. She wears a silver turban headpiece with a sparkly silver flower in the centre, with her brown hair tucked up in a low bun underneath.

Pamela is a prim, proper lady who is very well dressed in a black and white peplum jacket with white trim and a grey knee-length pleated skirt. She wears black rimmed glasses and has a fascinator-style grey tilt hat. She has straight blonde hair in a shoulder-length bob.

We meet Margret in wintery Scotland. She is a typical farmer's wife with a naïve sense of the world. She wears a knee-length tartan checked skirt, a grey button-down cardigan and a white apron. She has two long blonde plaits and a dark grey beret that sits on the back of her head.

The Clowns

David Collins and Shane Dundas (better known as the Umbilical Brothers) are the Clowns, who play the rest of the characters in the show. They are both average height and slim-built, in their late 40s.

David Collins has grey/brown curly hair that falls to just below his ears and is parted in the middle. Shane Dundas is bald and clean-shaven, a perfect starting point for the many wigs and hats he wears throughout the show.

The two Clowns play many characters between them, some for 3 minutes, some for 30! Some examples of the different costumes and characters are:

- A maid's outfit (apron and all!) and a porter's hat and coat for **Mr & Mrs McGarrigle** in the run-down hotel that Pamela and Richard stop at on the Scottish Moors.
- A sparkly suit jacket and top hat for the charismatic **Show Announcer** at the London Palladium.
- A three-piece pinstripe suit and bowler hat for the brainy performer **Mr Memory**, who memorises facts to list off for the amusement of the audience at the London Palladium.
- A long woollen dressing gown with a tie around the middle for the illusive and mysterious **Professor Jordan**.
- A long evening gown and fur coat with a feathery headpiece for the seductively attractive **Mrs Jordan** (played by one of the Clowns!)