

STAGES

# MRT brings '39 Steps' to life in season opener

It was a no-brainer for Courtney Sale to choose the hilarious whodunit "The 39 Steps" to open Merrimack Repertory Theatre's 44th season, Sept. 14-Oct. 2.

"It's a big, funny, laugh-a-minute show, a supremely entertaining night at the theatre, that had big run in 2008-2009. It's a great way to let our audiences know that it is safe to be back in the theatre again," she said recently.

Indeed, like other arts organizations, local to regional to national and beyond, MRT has waded through the pandemic landscape for 2½ years with filmed productions, mask mandates, vaccine requirements and mandatory negative Covid test results.

It's been daunting and precarious, and everybody is ready to laugh again. "The 39 Steps" is the perfect way to do that, she said.

The play is a parody adapted by Patrick Barlow from the 1915 novel by John Buchan, which Alfred Hitchcock made into a movie. It blends Hitchcock's juicy spy flick with a dash of vintage Monty Python and is equal parts hilarious whodunit, espionage thriller and quick-change comedy.

There's a beautiful woman, who claims to be a spy. And she plunges

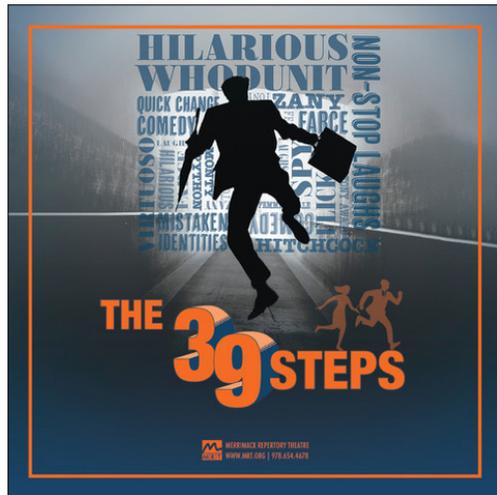


PHOTO COURTESY MRT

'The 39 Steps' opens Sept. 14 at MRT.

the hero, Richard Hanney, into a series of misadventures from an on-stage plane crash to missing fingers and a territorial flock of sheep.

"It's very physical, silly, high-energy with lots of vaudevillian moves," said Sale, the show's director and also MRT's artistic director.

The cast of four actors create over 100 crazy characters in "The 39 Steps."

Cast members include Tom Coiner, Margaret Ivey, Ken Robinson and Richard Nguyen Sloniker.

The show as much fun for them as it will be for the audience, Sale promised.

"We hope the show removes any anxiety about coming back to the theatre," she said.

It promises to be an unforgettable evening of non-stop laughs and is recommended for ages 10 and up.

Tickets start at \$21 and there are several discount offers. Visit <https://www.mrt.org/39Steps> or call 978-654-4678.

### In the wings

SEACOAST SEASON: Portsmouth, N.H. calls its recently announced 2023 season "The Impossible Dream," noting that it's filled with stories featuring underdogs with seemingly impossible dreams and legacies left behind that are greater than they could imagine. It includes "Man of LaMancha," Feb. 3-March 5; "Parade," March 17-April 9; "Ghost, The Musical," April 21-May



PHOTO COURTESY MRT

The cast of 'The 39 Steps' at MRT.

new drama about America at war with itself. It is onstage, Sept. 9-Oct. 8, at the Calderwood Pavilion at Boston Center for the Arts, 527 Tremont St., Boston. A week after the 2017 riots in Charlottesville, Virginia, four friends gather in a Wyoming backyard to gossip and reminisce. They've assembled to honor Gina, their mentor and the newly inaugurated president of a far-right Catholic university, the alma mater of all those assembled. But the celebratory reunion explodes into insults, accusations and revelations as the evening gets longer. Karen MacDonald leads the top-notch cast and Marianna Bassham directs. Tickets start at \$25 at 617-933-8600 or [www.SpeakEasyStage.com](http://www.SpeakEasyStage.com).

'TWILIGHT' AT ART: Actress-writer-scholar Anna Deveare Smith recently revised her gripping play "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" for a cast of five. Based on a series of interviews she conducted after the police were acquitted in the 1992 Rodney King police brutality case, it is a stirring cry for reform and relevant today. It is being performed through Sept. 24 at the American Repertory Theatre's Loeb Drama Center, Harvard Square, Cambridge. Numerous performances and discounts are available. Visit [www.AmericanRepertoryTheatre.org/Twilight](http://www.AmericanRepertoryTheatre.org/Twilight).

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PHOTO COURTESY SPEAKEASY STAGE

SpeakEasy Stage opens its new season this week with 'Heroes of the Fourth Turning'.

14; "Newsies: The Musical," May 26-July 8; "Hair," July 14-Aug. 27; "Bat Boy," Sept. 8-Oct. 29; "Passing Strange," Sept. 22-Oct. 21; and "Matilda," Nov. 10-Dec. 23. Season subscriptions available and until Sept. 15

are 25% off. Call 603-433-4472 or visit [www.seacoastrep.org](http://www.seacoastrep.org).

HEAR IT FOR 'HEROES': SpeakEasy Stage Company opens its 32nd season with "Heroes of the Fourth Turning," a searing