

Stage Door: The 39 Steps

September 19th, 2010 [Noah Jordan](#)

Hitchcock's reputation as the master of suspense began in 1935 with *The 39 Steps*. Photos of its stars, Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll, appear in numerous film anthologies and histories. Adapted by Patrick Barlow, the concept took shape and *The 39 Steps* became a 4-actor, comic spoof that nabbed an Olivier Award for Best Comedy, and now opens the 2010-2011 Denver Center Theatre Company season with a bang and has audiences in stitches.

The plot begins when a debonair gentleman-adventurer Richard Hannay (Sam Gregory) discovers that a foreign enemy spy ring called "The Thirty Nine Steps" is trying to smuggle scientific-military secrets out of Britain, he sets out to stop them single-handedly while also being chased by the police who, wrongly, of course, suspect him of murder.



(L-R) Larry Paulsen and Sam Gregory in the DCTC production of *The 39 Steps*. Photo by Terry Shapiro.

Gregory plays the square-jawed Hannay with just the right amount of self-assurance, using a bewildered expression or arched eyebrow to great effect, but not going over the top. The rest of the cast are at full throttle in their multiple roles.

Victoria Mack moves from being a black-clad, German-accented femme fatale, to a shy, impressionable crofter's wife, and a dumb but well-mannered blonde handcuffed to Hannay who reluctantly falls for his

charms. Mack is sensational, transitioning with ease and grace, each of her characters is drastically different and equally believable.



(L-R) Sam Gregory as “Richard Hannay” in the DCTC production of *The 39 Steps*. Photo by Terry Shapiro.

The hard-working, Larry Paulsen and Rob Nagle are the show's chameleons, switching hats, costumes, accents and even genders to play all the other parts, including bumbling policemen, enemy agents, local Highlanders and (respectively) the gloating Nazi villain Professor Jordan and the robotic yet pathetic Mr. Memory, who is “programmed” to answer any question he is asked — even if it means betraying his nefarious employers, *The Thirty Nine Steps*.

The two stretch their comic muscles to the snapping point, as well as hefting much of the furniture that coalesces so unexpectedly into all sorts of landscapes. They never appear to sweat it. The exasperation they occasionally show is in the script. The actors themselves seem to be having a good time, even laughing occasionally at their own silliness.



(L-R) Larry Paulsen and Rob Nagle in the DCTC production of *The 39 Steps*. Photo by Terry Shapiro.

The creative team, led by director Art Manke, deserves our respect and admiration. *The 39 Steps* plays at the Ricketson Theatre now through November 14th.

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Denver Center Theatre Company

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