



Elmwood Playhouse Presents *The 39 Steps* in Nyack *Hitchcock Gets a Comic Twist*

BY: Robert Jowaiszas



The 39 Steps, directed by Margaret Young, is now playing at Elmwood Playhouse from May 15 through June 6, 2026 in Nyack.

The 39 Steps, is a fast-paced comedy-Thriller adapted for the stage by Patrick Barlow from the classic 1935 Hitchcock film the novel by John Buchan that follows Richard Hannay, an ordinary man suddenly pulled into an international spy mystery after a chance encounter with a mysterious woman who is later found murdered.



Falsely accused and on the run, Hannay races across Scotland and England to clear his name while uncovering a secret organization known only as “The 39 Steps.” Along the way, he is pursued by police, spies, and unexpected double agents, all while trying to stay one step ahead in a world where no one can be trusted.

The production blends Hitchcock-style suspense with physical comedy, rapid costume changes, and inventive old-fashioned stagecraft.

The cast includes Rob Eigenbrod as Richard Hannay, Traci Redmond as Annabella/Pamela/Margaret, Christine Gnieski as Clown 1, and Rob Webber as Clown 2 and Mr. Memory.

The production arrives with a strong theatrical reputation. Elmwood Playhouse continues its tradition of inventive community theater, and this staging is no exception. It highlights the idea that “less is more,” using minimalist sets, simple props, and tightly coordinated effects to recreate Hitchcock-style suspense onstage.

Much of that precision is supported behind the scenes by set designer Bill Mentz, lighting designer Mike Gnazzo, sound

designer Larry Siegel, costume designer Maddelyn Curbelo, and property designer Rich Ciero, all of whom help create a world that shifts quickly with the action.

The four-actor format demands constant transformation, with performers moving rapidly through multiple characters and accents. At times, audience members described the experience as “madcap,” “campy,” and “absurdly entertaining,” with the energy of something like *The Play That Goes Wrong* in its physical comedy and controlled theatrical chaos.

Special effects by Jennie Marino add another layer, heightening both suspense and comedy in equal measure.

At the same time, the production leans heavily into rapid-fire pacing and broad comic repetition, which occasionally softens the sense of suspense and creates moments where transitions feel intentionally loose or slightly uneven. The overall tone favors playful momentum over tension, keeping the audience more focused on comedy than thriller-style edge-of-your-seat anticipation.

In Elmwood Playhouse’s production, the four-member cast carries an enormous workload, shifting characters at a dizzying pace while maintaining forward motion. Stage manager Allison Schneider helps keep those rapid transitions organized and consistent behind the scenes.

Director Margaret Young keeps the production lively and well-paced, balancing physical comedy with the demands of constant role-switching and quick scene changes. The result is a show that moves steadily, even when it deliberately leans into theatrical mayhem.

Rob Eigenbrod anchors the production with a focused, quick-witted, and understatedly comic performance as Richard Hannay, grounding the action while reacting to the increasing absurdity around him.

Traci Redmond brings versatility and strong character work to Annabella, Pamela, and Margaret, shifting between mystery,

romance, and comedy with clear distinction.

Christine Gnieski delivers high-energy, physically driven comedy as Clown 1, maintaining much of the production’s momentum through bold character shifts and reaction work.

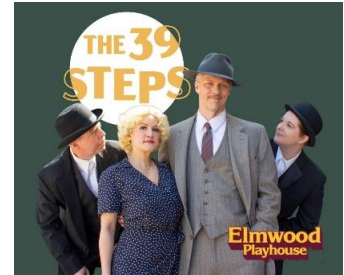
Rob Webber adds a sly, eccentric comic edge as Clown 2 and Mr. Memory, contributing to the production’s fast-moving transitions and offbeat humor.

Together, the cast captures what has made *The 39 Steps* a popular stage adaptation for years — inventive storytelling, fast-paced comedy, and the challenge of building a full theatrical world with a small ensemble.

After the show, Rob Eigenbrod said his approach came from a close reading of the text and careful preparation, describing it as one of the most deeply studied roles he has taken on, something that comes through in the performance.

Director Margaret Young is also affiliated with Another Step, a nonprofit supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. The organization will host a May 27 fundraising theater night for *The 39 Steps* at Elmwood Playhouse in Nyack.

In the end, *The 39 Steps* plays like a cleverly assembled spy spoof that doesn’t always aim for tension so much as playful invention. At times is more comedic farce than thriller, and occasionally leaning into a deliberately Monty Python-style spirit of theatrical mischief.



Elmwood Playhouse, now approaching its 80th year, continues to use its intimate, vintage space to great effect, giving audiences an up-close experience that heightens both the humor and the physical storytelling onstage.