

Theatre Aurora's 'Murder on the Orient Express' - A Review

By **Scott Johnston**

Theatre Aurora has just the ticket one needs to experience an evening of murder, mystery and deduction with its latest play 'Murder on the Orient Express', based on what is arguably Agatha Christie's most famous and popular mystery.

As the story unfolds, it is the mid 1930s and a murder has taken place on the fabled train, which has been stopped in the mountains of Yugoslavia by snowdrifts on the tracks.

Fortunately, the brilliant Belgian detective Hercule Poirot is on board.

But the case is most challenging. The American murder victim was unpopular, but none of the numerous first-class compartment suspects with varying backgrounds seem to have apparent motives, and all have airtight alibis.

With only his instincts and 'little grey cells' can he (and the audience) correctly identify the killer in the short time before the train is freed, or the murderer strikes again?

This version of the story adapted by Ken Ludwig reduces the number of characters from the book, but there are still plenty of international suspects on stage, including English governess Mary Debenham (played by Caitlin Feldman), nervous American secretary Hector MacQueen (Kevin Shaver), French conductor Pierre Michel (Tim Gernstein), Russian Princess Natalia Dragomiroff (Deborah Lobban), Swedish missionary Greta Ohlsson (Leanne Goldstein), Hungarian Countess Andrenyi (Jess Falcioni), American widow Helen Hubbard (Lise Boily), English Colonel John Arbuthnot (Joe Nessumo, who also plays the ill-fated murder victim), and Poirot's good friend and fellow Belgian Monsieur Bouc (Bill Baker).

All of the cast manage their parts (and accents) well, and give each of their characters the appropriate personalities to make them interesting, different and mysterious.

Rounding out the cast as Hercule Poirot is Chris Cole, who somehow commands the stage in a very subtle and low-key way.

The story moves along briskly, and the Theatre Aurora crew under director Neill Kernohan has done an admirable job through sets, lighting, video and sound of creating the illusion of much of the story taking place on a train.

Even if one is familiar with the story, it's highly entertaining watching it unfold on stage as the detective makes sense of the various and often unrelated clues he unearths and pieces them together to solve the case.

Tickets are selling fast for the crowd-pleasing production, so you should get yours quickly to avoid disappointment.

Evening performances of 'Murder on the Orient Express' continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, January 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20 with matinees January 13, 14 & 21. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.