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Bucks County Playhouse's 'Clue' will have you laughing through the mystery



PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS The cast of "Clue" includes Sally Struthers, Kevin Carolan, Brian Carter, Lindsay Chambers, Erin Dilly, Clifton Duncan, Cassandra Dupler, Carson Elrod, Claire Simba and William Youmans.

By Frank Burd

It was the 1950's and we were playing board games. The biggest one was "Monopoly," though many were still playing "Parcheesi." Sometime in that decade, Parker Brothers, the developers of Monopoly, brought a new game to us baby boomers, "Clue," and we fell in love with it.

Like Monopoly, which in addition to dice and money, had added little green houses and red hotels, Clue had it's props — a rope, a lead pipe, a gun, and even a candlestick. The names of the characters were fun — Professor Plum, Miss Scarlett, Colonel Mustard, and Miss Peacock. We picked up clues and traveled the game board of the mansion from the conservatory and library to the billiard room, from the ballroom and study to the kitchen, and we tried to figure out who the murderer was.



PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS The cast of "Clue."

In 1985, they made a movie with an all-star cast. A not-too-successful musical of Clue appeared Off-Broadway in 1997. Well, Parker Brothers is gone (bought by Hasbro), but the fascination with Clue persists, and a new production has been created, making its world premier at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope. Based on the screenplay by Jonathan Lynn, this new incarnation on the stage is smart, funny, and a visual treat to behold.

Let me say right off that this is less a whodunit than a witty look at six colorful characters who have been invited to the mansion by a mysterious Mr. Boddy who we soon learn, is blackmailing all six. Also present in the house are the beautiful maid, Colette, the cook, Mrs. Solyanka, and the inevitable butler, Wadsworth. They are as colorful as their guests.

The time is 1954. The invitees are radically different from one another. One is in the military, another in politics, another in show business, still another who runs an escort service. They all have questionable histories and motives, but I wasn't trying to figure out the story. I was laughing at all the clever wordplay and the stylized jokes. I was watching the way the director, Hunter Foster and scenic designer Anna Louizos skillfully move the characters around the set in a far more interesting manner than a game board. In fact, one needs no knowledge of the game itself to appreciate "Clue."

The principals travel from room to room, usually led by Wadsworth (Carson Elrod). What a talent he is! But then, so are each and every member of this talented cast. Most will recall Sally Struthers from the ground breaking TV show, "All in the Family." She's a blast as Miss Peacock. I wish I had space to list them all.

Go. Laugh. Enjoy the privilege of seeing the first round of a new play that's sure to become a staple in American theater.

IF YOU GO

"Clue" will be on stage through May 20 at Bucks County Playhouse. 70 South Main St., New Hope. Call 215-862-2121 or check Buckscountyplayhouse.org for tickets and more information. Based on the screenplay by Jonathan Lynn with additional material by Eric Price and Hunter Foster. Directed by Hunter Foster.