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Sally Struthers and company are fast, furious, funny in ‘Clue: On Stage’ at Bucks County

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JOAN MARCUS

(Left to right:) Sally Struthers, Lindsay Nicole Chambers, Clifton Duncan, Kevin Carolan, Carson Elrod, Brian J. Carter, and Erin Dilly in the Bucks County Playhouse world premiere of “Clue: On Stage.”



by **John Timpane**, Staff Writer [@jtimpane](https://twitter.com/jtimpane) | jt@phillynews.com

The farce is with us. So is the meta-pulp: the loving, satirical send-up of a genre such as the adventure tale, the spy caper, the murder mystery, the bedroom-hopper. We've recently seen *Murder on the Orient Express* at McCarter Theatre, *The Prisoner of Zenda* at the Hedgerow Theatre, and *Happy Birthday* at 1812 Productions. It can't be the age we live in – theaters choose their plays a year and more in advance – but it sure fits this time and place.

Make room for [*Clue: On Stage*, world-premiering through May 20 at Bucks County Playhouse](#). Meta-data: This athletic magnum-farce is based on the Jonathan Lynn script for the [1985 cult-classic film *Clue*](#), itself based on the Hasbro board game franchise, around in various guises since 1949. Director Hunter Foster expertly adapted the Lynn script along with writer Eric Price.

Clue: On Stage is an uproarious 90-minute sprint. The setting is, of course, a mansion on a rainy night, 1954, and a stew of corruption, sex, nuclear secrets, J. Edgar Hoover, and ... Yiddish dance. Leading the maniacal ensemble is vaulting, mugging Carson Elrod as Wadsworth, our butler, emcee, and chorus; [Sally Struthers](#) of [All in the Family](#) fame, having a ball as Mrs. Peacock; Clifton Duncan as Professor Plum, and ... it's a well-honed team with impeccable timing in (more or less) real time. A special word for Claire Simba as Yvette: She serves a delicious flute of champagne.

As in the board game, we have murders, weapons, suspects with arch names, blackmail, and a scramble for evidence. Nonsense dancing also breaks out. As everyone races throughout the mansion seeking, losing, and stealing a key to a crucial door, we get a loony boogaloo to the rhythms of "Sing Sing Sing"; when we must dance with corpses to bamboozle a dim-witted cop, we do ... the indescribable.

Just as breathtaking is the set by Anna Louizos, with sliding panels, opening and closing apertures, genre decor, and the traditional brace of side doors for farce. Ryan O'Gara's lighting races along, directing us to silliness explosions in bloody corners. One-liners, some of them from the film, machine-gun: "Who designed this place? The Parker Brothers?" or "It must have been a great shock to him when he died" or "Husbands should be like Kleenex: soft, strong, and disposable."

We are invited to guess the killer, but, seriously, no way. With everything so fast and funny, the board-game framework soon is left out in the rain. Long, fast-talking explanations erupt, comically hauling in stuff we could never have known; that, too, is part of the send-up.

The greatest single line? Shot by an FBI man, a character writhes on stage, and shouts out, on the night President Trump fired James Comey: "You're an FBI guy? Do you guys even have a *director*?"

Soon this world premiere will sprint off to distant corners of the land: Bucks County Playhouse announced Wednesday that a national tour will launch in 2018/19.

Clue: On Stage. Through May 20 at Bucks County Playhouse, 70 S. Main St., New Hope.
Tickets: \$40-\$85. Information: 215-862-2121, buckscountyplayhouse.org.