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Review: 'Clue On Stage' at Bucks County Playhouse



Lindsay Nicole Chambers, Kevin Carolan, Erin Dilly, Brian J. Carter, Carlson Elrod, Clifton Duncan and Sally Struthers. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Wanna play a game?

Clue On Stage is a show that doesn't ask deep, profound questions of its audience. Instead, it simply asks, whodunit? Who killed Mr. Boddy? Was it Professor Plum in the conservatory with the candlestick? Or was it Miss Scarlet in the library with the lead pipe?

Yes, it's a play based on the classic board game *Clue* – but more directly, it's based on the 1985 movie version of *Clue* that's become a TV staple over the years and has developed a cult following. That movie isn't the smartest or most sophisticated comedy ever made, but it's a lovably ridiculous romp enlivened by top-tier comedic talent. Now that familiar title and those (literally) colorful characters are back, in *Clue On Stage*, having its world premiere at the Bucks County Playhouse. (A national tour has just been announced for the 2018-19 season.)



William Youmans, Carlson Elrod, Clifton Duncan, Lindsay Nicole Chambers, Brian J. Carter, Sally Struthers, Kevin Carolan and Erin Dilly. Photo by Joan Marcus.

So, how does the stage version compare to the movie? Well, it's more of the same; it replicates the movie extremely closely – too closely at times. The modest changes, such as transforming Professor Plum from a psychiatrist to an acting teacher, provide for some more jokes but have little effect on the plot. Also, the play resolves using only one ending, rather than the movie's choice of three alternative endings.

The stage version is even sillier and cornier than the movie, and the plot complications creak louder than the steps in Mr. Boddy's mansion. But it does have a lot of funny lines – and that makes most of its weaknesses easy to forgive. And in its best moments, *Clue On Stage* rises above its limitations and becomes a delightful screwball lark, thanks to a sparkling cast, high production values, and oodles of comic energy.

Jonathan Lynn's script, adapted and expanded here by Eric Price and Hunter Foster, spoofs Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* by assembling a group of six strangers in a remote, mysterious mansion and giving each of them a shady past and a motive to commit murder. This being *Clue*, they also end up with an assortment of weapons (the revolver, the rope, the wrench, etc.) and a bunch of rooms to gallop through or kill in (the ballroom, the billiard room, etc.). However, the transition from board game to stage play isn't always a smooth one: The play seems more concerned with fitting in all of the game's trademark elements than with constructing a logical, credible plot. (But then again, if you left any of those elements out, it wouldn't be *Clue*, would it?)

Foster's direction moves at a fast clip, which helps to sell the comedy. He's also devised some wonderful comic set pieces, including a rather ingenious staging of a locked-room scene. And he uses some cinematic-style scene transitions that make the most of Anna Luizos' lavish set design, which recreates all nine of the board game's rooms with wit and panache. Nicole V. Moody's costumes add more glamour, and the immersive lighting (by Ryan O'Gara) and sound (Bart Fasbender) add to the spookiness. And while *Clue On Stage* isn't a musical, music and dance play an important part: a

keyboardist (Tom Fosnacht) performs live underscoring for much of the show, and Jennifer Cody's clever choreography (often with the cast moving in unison) gives the show a great deal of momentum and buoyancy.



Sally Struthers, Kevin Carolan, Erin Dilly, Carson Elrod, Clifton Duncan, Lindsay Nicole Chambers and Brian J. Carter. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Much of the charm of *Clue* lies in its outlandish characters, and the performances here rise to the occasion. Carson Elrod leads the cast with a smirking, giddy performance as Wadsworth the butler; his glee is infectious. Erin Dilly channels the late Madeline Kahn with her twitching, fidgety and uproarious turn as Mrs. White. Sally Struthers earns laughs (and a lot of the audience's affection) with her endearing take on the talkative and agitated Mrs. Peacock, while Kevin Carolan (as the pompous and dense Colonel Mustard) and Lindsay Nicole Chambers (as the sarcastic Miss Scarlet) do strong work carrying much of the show's verbal humor. Brian J. Carter (as Mr. Green) and Clifton Duncan (as Professor Plum) are both excellent, although their characters are underwritten and less interesting compared to their co-stars. And the supporting cast handles a multitude of roles, with William Youmans' snarling Mr. Boddy especially impressive.

Clue On Stage isn't a perfect murder comedy, but it's got a dizzy, stimulating joy that makes it a whole lot of fun. It's a game that's definitely worth playing.

Running Time: Approximately 90 minutes, with no intermission.