



### **St Gregory's Catholic High School: The 39 Steps - a comedic delight!**

As an NSTA representative, I had the great pleasure of attending St Gregory's Catholic High School's production of 'The 39 Steps' on Thursday 28th November 2024. The performance, expertly directed by Ms Helen Chappel and Miss Sara O'Connor, stayed true to the play text and captivated the audience. A highly skilled ensemble of 55 young performers brought this show to life, delivering an unforgettable evening of theatre.

Patrick Barlow's 'The 39 Steps' is an adaptation of John Buchan's 1915 novel. Barlow's 2005 stage adaptation enjoyed a successful West End run from 2006 to 2015, becoming the fifth-longest running play in history by the time it closed. The play has also been adapted into a film and is regularly performed in theatres. The performance is a whirlwind of slapstick comedy, from police chases to murder plots and daring escapades, all wrapped up in a good old-fashioned love story.

The audience was taken on a thrilling journey, from a modest flat in London to the rugged Scottish Highlands and back to the iconic London Palladium, where Richard Hannay ultimately confronts the villainous forces. Along the way, a host of entertaining characters—complete with a range of accents and secrets—added to the intrigue. While the original play was designed for four actors playing 26 roles, St Gregory's version was ingeniously crafted into a unique, exquisitely entertaining spectacle by a troupe of actors demonstrating impeccable professionalism and comedic timing.

The battle between good and evil played out by Jacob in his leading role as Richard Hannay as he triumphantly solves the mystery of *The 39 Steps* was exemplary, deserving of the standing ovation at curtain call. His performance captured the essence of Hannay with remarkable authenticity, offering a deeply immersive experience that resonated throughout the auditorium. The natural emotional flow of his line delivery was flawless, and his physicality added depth to the character through well-thought-out movements and expressions. As Hannay fought to clear his name and protect the country from impending doom, Jacob's portrayal of a trademark stiff upper lip and excellent comedic timing enriched the storytelling, inviting the audience to join him on his wild ride. Jacob's awareness of the ensemble was evident, enhancing the synergy of the cast and drawing the audience further into the world of the play.

Emily's portrayal of Pamela Edwards was equally impressive. Her performance was convincing and enjoyable, skillfully capturing the essence of her character with clear line delivery and emotional engagement. She portrayed Pamela's motivations and emotions with authenticity, and her expressions and gestures were executed with precision, adding depth to her character and the overall narrative. Throughout, Emily showed excellent awareness of the ensemble, contributing positively to the overall dynamics of the production.

The ensemble cast delivered a strong, cohesive performance, working together seamlessly to enhance the production's dynamics. The synergy among the actors was palpable, and their coordinated teamwork created a balanced, engaging stage presence. Each member contributed to the energy of the performance, adapting effortlessly to the changing scenes and moods, while transitions between



ensemble sequences were smoothly executed, ensuring a constant flow throughout. The ensemble's collective effort and commitment were vital to the success of the production.

The design team and backstage crew deserve high praise for their exceptional contributions to this production. The creative staging, costumes, and props enhanced the narrative, and careful attention to detail was evident in every aspect. The costume changes for the ensemble were frequent but implemented with precision, while scene transitions were handled seamlessly. The technical aspects of sound and lighting complemented the atmosphere without overpowering the production, and the exemplary comedic timing helped to immerse the audience in the slapstick chases and espionage.

The collaboration between cast and crew was clear, resulting in a production that felt cohesive and well-rehearsed. The production's comedic elements were a standout, performed with perfect timing. The police chases, reminiscent of the Keystone Cops, included inventive physical theatre, with actors climbing in and out of 'windows' that moved up and down the wall, facilitating quick escapes. The ensemble's creative use of symbolic, stylised representations of cars, doors, windows, and walls added an extra layer of humor. The synchronisation of the British fighter pilots, enhanced by creative lighting and sound effects, was particularly effective. Dominic and Bertie's performances as Salesman 1 and Salesman 2 evoked classic comedy duos like Laurel and Hardy, drawing the audience in with their slapstick antics and impeccable diction.

Every member of the ensemble—cast, crew, and technicians—deserves commendation for their contributions. The production left a lasting impact, not only on the audience but also on the performers and their directors. Following the final bow, it was clear that the experience of creating this production would resonate with everyone involved for a long time to come. Empowered by drama, the cast and crew made a significant impact on those both onstage and in the audience, delivering a truly remarkable performance. **National School Theatre Awards** [www.schooltheatreawards.com](http://www.schooltheatreawards.com)

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