

# THEATER REVIEW: ‘THE MOUSETRAP’ AT METROPOLIS ARTS THEATRE

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Here is your next bar bet: Name the longest running play in a major theater market. No, it is not “Phantom of the Opera” on Broadway; it is Agatha Christie’s “The Mousetrap” in the fashionable theatre district of London’s West End. It opened in the fall of 1952, just before Eisenhower was elected president, and is still running.

Yes, 27,000 performances later, “The Mousetrap” remains an icon of theatrical longevity among the slots in the major theatrical markets and a testimonial to the eternal appeal of the criminal world of Agatha Christie.

The current production of director Joe Lehman at Arlington Heights’ Metropolis Arts Theatre is a pleasant reminder of why this play will be staged as long as there is an audience for crime thrillers. But first, a word about the play’s author, Dame Agatha Christie.

In her 86 years, she created 66 novels that were written in her own name, 6 romance novels under the name of Mary Westmacott, 3 non-fiction memoirs, and she even found time to pen 2 volumes of poetry. At any time, any one of her 30 plays (note—10 were more were discovered in 2015) are being performed displaying the worldwide demand for her stories. That body of writing currently appears around the world in 103 languages.



Colin Lawrence, Emma Baker and David Moreland (right). Photo by Ellen Prather.

Her sales of 2 billion copies and counting, puts her historically in third place behind only “The Bible” and the works of Shakespeare. Her well-known character of Hercule Poirot is the only fictional character given an obituary by “The New York Times.” Yet, this play, based on a true event in rural England in 1945, just might outlive all of her plots and characters.

“The Mousetrap” began as a radio play, called “Three Blind Mice” in 1947. Later, she adapted that into the full-length stage production that many audiences have experienced over the years.

(Note that here with this play and others, she often adapted short plays for stage and/or television, creating confusion over the exact number plays she wrote. My number of 30 comes from the Agatha Christie website.) After lukewarm reviews, audiences could not stay away and her estate will not change the stage directions that the play is set in “the present,” meaning the early 1950s.

Director Lehman has carefully recreated a 1950s atmosphere on the stage of the Metropolis Arts with the help of scenic designer Jeremy Hollis and costume designer Cathy Tantilillo. But that English atmosphere, so important in this claustrophobic drawing room drama, needs English accents and an Italian accent. Credit dialect coach, Saren Nofs Snyder with making the experience quite real.

At the final curtain the cast begged the audience not give away too much of the plot, so let’s just say here that Agatha Christie loved murders and multiple suspects and red herrings, and all that is here in an English country manor. Joe Lehman’s Metropolis cast is spot on from their accents to their characterizations to the sheer fun they radiate performing this well-traveled thriller. If you have heard about this legendary play and wondered why it is so successful, this is your chance.

The actual origin of this story from Agatha Christie is a short story called “Three Blind Mice.” She designated it could not be published until the play closed in London. Officially, the short story is not available in Great Britain as of this date. But, it has been available in the US since 1950, and now with internet sales, UK residents can read and relish the details of this classic in prose. And note—There is no film version of “The Mousetrap” in English due to that same restriction of its London run.

“The Mousetrap” continues at the Metropolis Arts Performing Arts Centre in downtown Arlington Heights at 111 West Campbell Street. For further information go to: [Metropolisarts.com](http://Metropolisarts.com), or call their box office at—847-577-2121.

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