

'The Mousetrap' snaps in Metropolis production of murder-mystery



Mollie Ralston (Emma Baker), center, de-escalates a fight between guest Christopher Wren (Colin Lawrence), left, and her husband, Giles (David Moreland), in Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" at the Metropolis. (*Courtesy of Metropolis Performing Arts Centre*)



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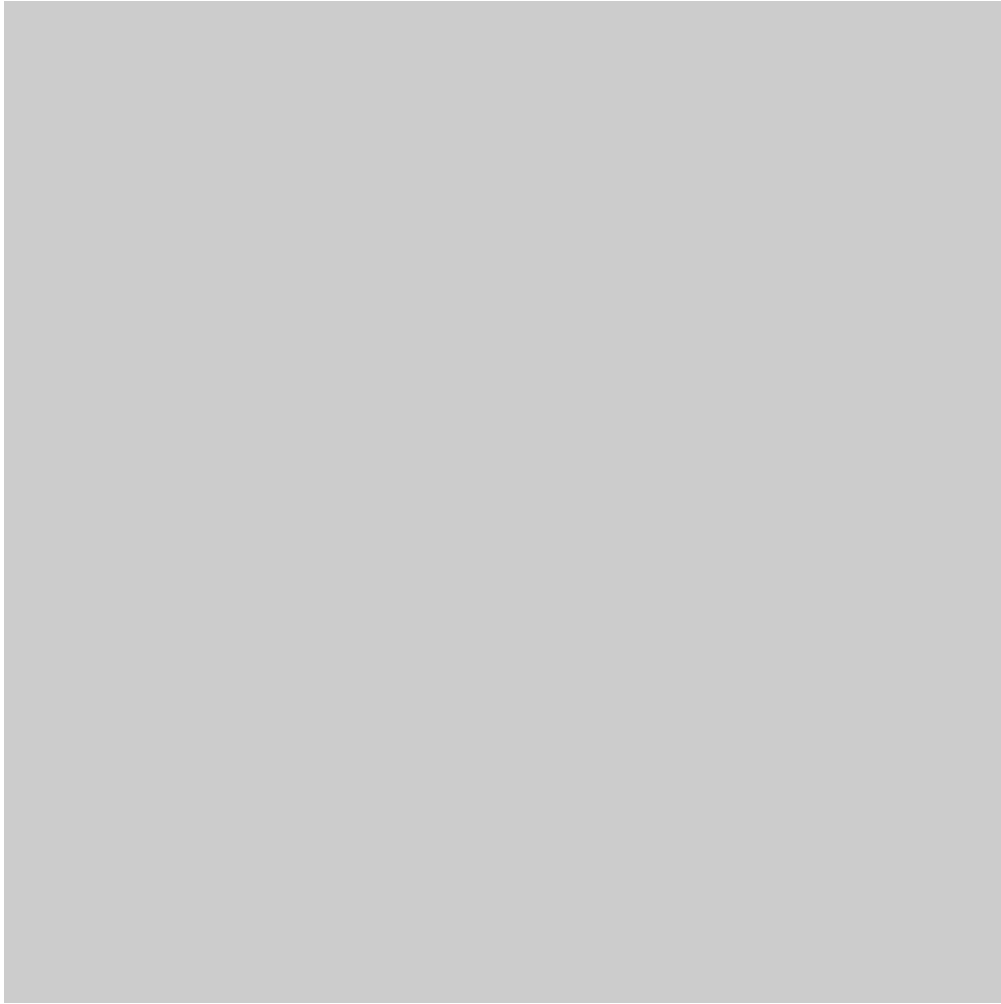
"The Mousetrap" -- ★ ★ ★

At a recent packed performance of "The Mousetrap" at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre in Arlington Heights, some audience members couldn't help but play detective with mid-show mutterings of "She did it!" and "It's got to be him!"

That's to be expected with Agatha Christie's venerable 1952 murder-mystery. After all these years, Christie still keeps an audience guessing.

"The Mousetrap" might seem creaky with its sometimes disapproving views toward characters who stray from typical gender roles. And more recent mystery-thrillers, including Ira Levin's "Deathtrap" (1978) and Rupert Holmes' "Accomplice" (1990), feature more shocking twists as well as a hipper self-awareness.

But "The Mousetrap" still works as gripping theater -- especially when a well-performed production comes along like that at the Metropolis.

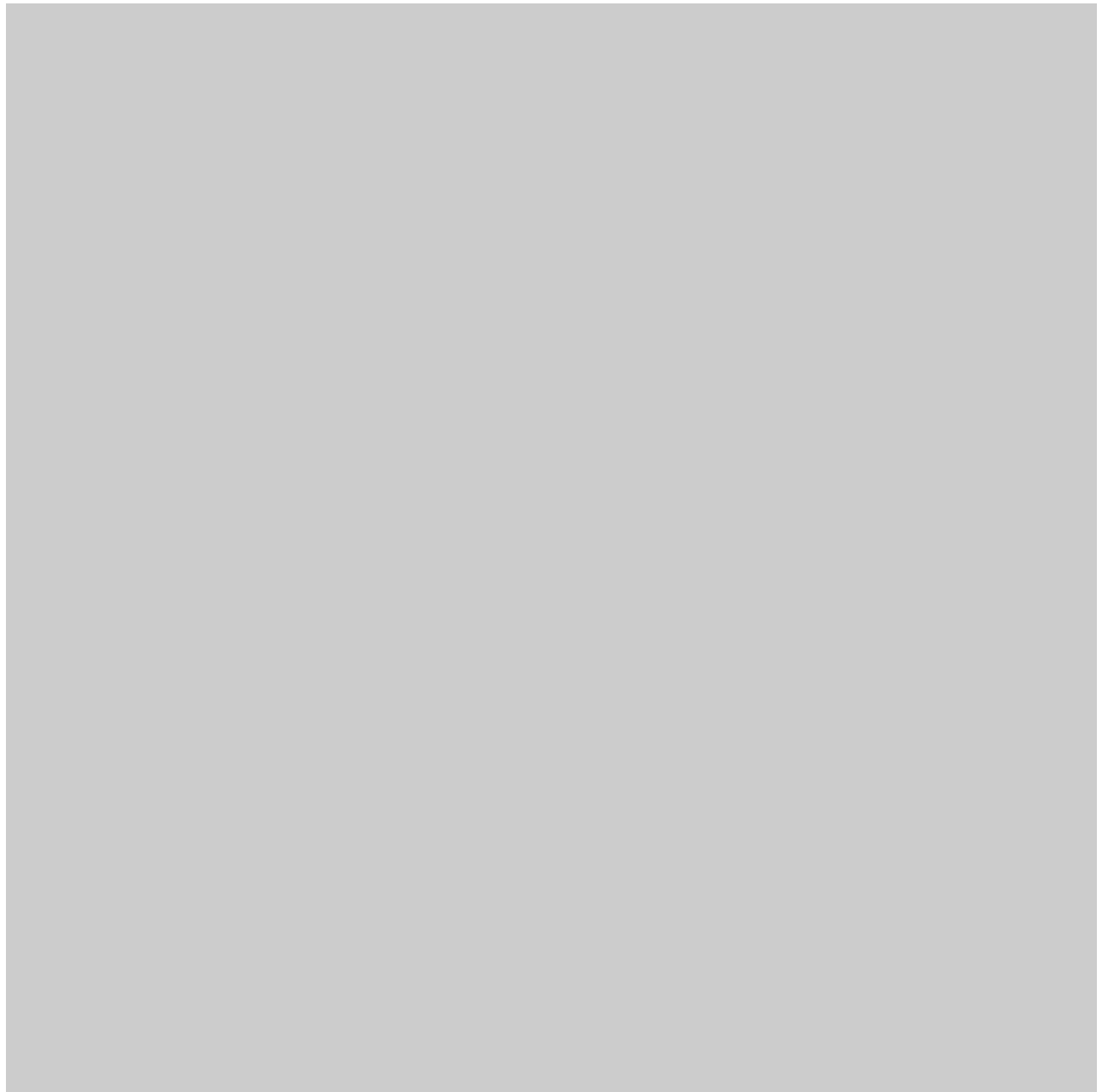


Detective Sergeant Trotter (Mac Westcott), right, questions guesthouse owners Mollie (Emma Baker) and Giles Ralston (David Moreland) following a murder in Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre in Arlington Heights. -
Courtesy of Metropolis Performing Arts Centre

Director Joe Lehman and his cast largely avoid the play's potential pitfalls. A few characters function solely as red herrings to throw you off the scent of the killer, so it's necessary to shape them into relatable characters. Some at Metropolis work better than others, but overall the cast sells the mystery.

The play's remote setting is Monkswell Manor, a grand home that has just been converted to a guesthouse by the young couple Mollie and Giles Ralston (Emma Baker and David Moreland). Strangers arrive on

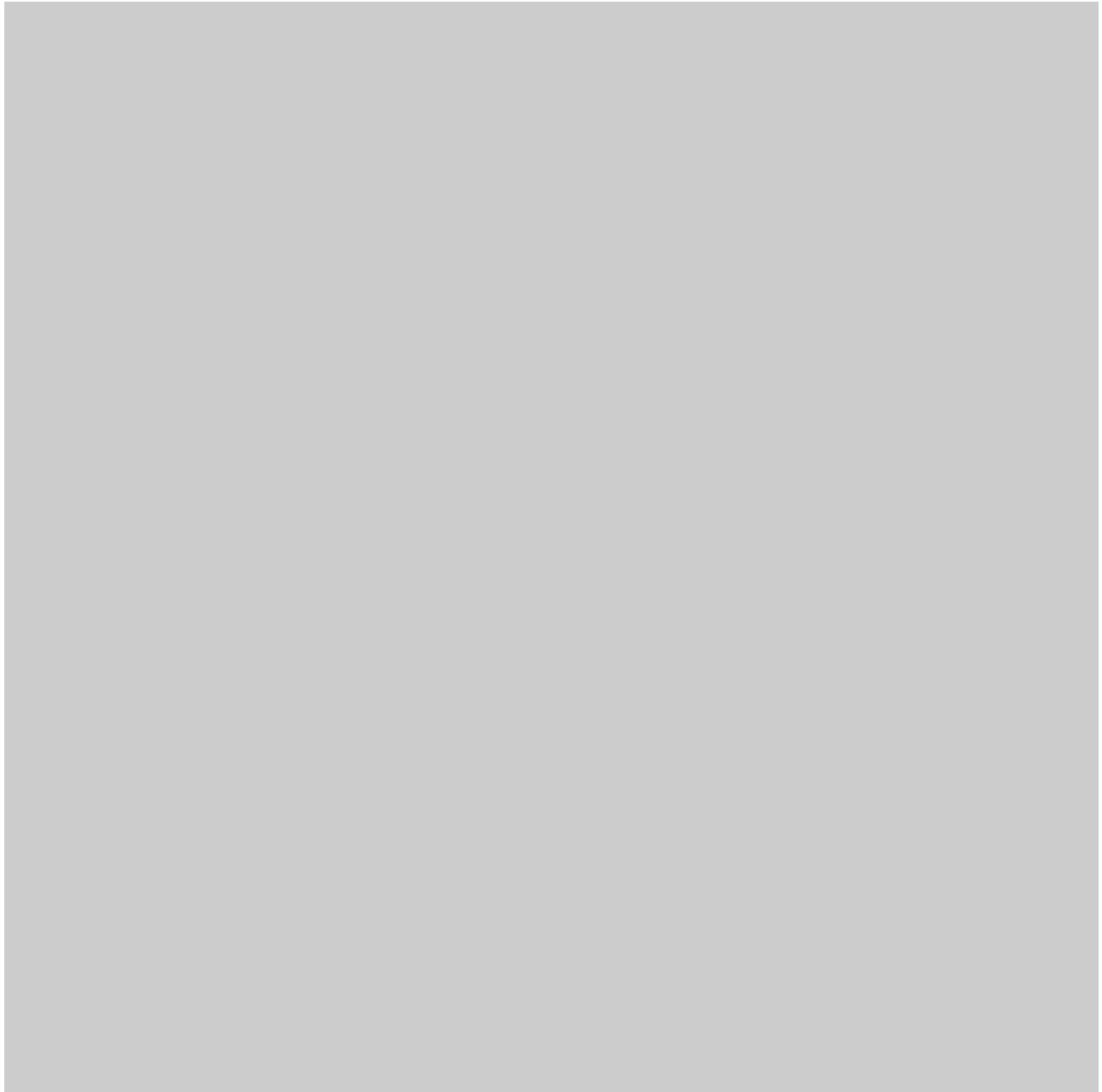
the first day of business amid a raging snowstorm. They include the snooty former magistrate Mrs. Boyle (Julie Partyka), a young and fey architect glaringly named Christopher Wren (Colin Lawrence), the stuffy Major Metcalf (Rian Jairell), the continental bohemian Miss Casewell (Katie Incardona) and a gregarious Italian traveler named Mr. Paravicini (Guy Wicke).



Miss Casewell (Katie Incardona) and Christopher Wren (Colin Lawrence) read about a London murder in Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap," now playing at the Metropolis in Arlington Heights. -
Courtesy of Metropolis Performing Arts Centre

Everyone is shaken by reports of a London murder that morning, and the tension builds when Detective Sergeant Trotter (Mac Westcott) arrives via skis to alarm the snowbound guests. A notebook left behind at the murder scene listed the address of Monkswell Manor, so there's a killer on the loose.

Along with strong performances, Metropolis' "Mousetrap" features fine production values. Set designer Jeremy Hollis stages the manor's grand drawing room with a craggy stone frame suggesting that we can see through the building's walls.



Giles (David Moreland) and Mollie Ralston (Emma Baker) question their unexpected guest Mr. Paravicini (Guy Wicke), seated, in Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" at the Metropolis. - Courtesy of Metropolis Performing Arts Centre

Costumer Catherine Tantillo's 1950s outfits help set the scene, while lighting designer Chelsea Lynn works to ratchet up the suspense (especially when a murder is committed amid a complete blackout).

There's no official film or TV version of "The Mousetrap." Christie contractually stipulated that one could not be made until the original London production -- still open as the world's longest-running play -- closed.

A good "Mousetrap" should work with clockwork precision, and the one sprung at Metropolis does just that. Even if you know the identity of the killer, the whodunit still entertains.

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Location: Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W. Campbell St., Arlington Heights, (847) 577-2121 or metropolisarts.com (<http://metropolisarts.com>)

Showtimes: 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday (also 1 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 20); through March 16

Running time: About 2 hours 30 minutes with intermission

Tickets: \$40

Parking: Area street parking and adjacent garage

Rating: Scenes of violence; for teens and older

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