

changing the paradigm



111,276

Thursday, September 22, 2011

Inventive, madcap "Around the World in 80 Days"

WEST HARTFORD — Before television's "The Amazing Race," before the movie "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad, World," there was Jules Verne's novel "Around the World in 80 Days."

Adapted by Mark Brown and directed by Russell Treyz, this production at the Playhouse on Park takes the play a step farther and has five talented and versatile actors play over 30 characters, including a panther and a monkey.

The play takes place in 1872 as the set, designed by Bob Phillips tells us twice, on the painted floor and on the backdrop of a map of the earth.

The independently wealthy, supremely confident, and fastidious stuffed shirt Phileas Fogg (Russell Garrett) makes a 20,000-pound bet at the Reform Club in London that he can travel around the world by steamer and railway in 80 days.

"The unforeseen does not exist," Fogg boldly states. And when it does, money helps. With only a table and a few chairs, we travel with the characters from England by boat, train, sled with a sail, and even an elephant to India, Hong Kong, China, Japan, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and back to London.

Just before he departs for his record setting, seemingly impossible journey, Fogg hires French manservant Passepartout (the athletic Aidan O'Shea) who literally flips over backwards to please his new boss. Passepartout says he is looking for a quieter life, but ends up with more excitement than he bargained for.

Meanwhile, a great theft has taken place in London and Fogg is suspected of committing the crime, so Detective Fix (Chris Mixon, looking and acting much like Nathan Lane) chases around the world after him.

While in India they come upon a Suttee, an outlawed Hindu human sacrifice where the wife throws herself on the funeral pyre with her husband when he dies.

They rescue the young woman, Aouda, played by Veronique Hurley, who joins them on the rest of their journey and in the process humanizes Fogg.

Hurley holds her own with the boys, but sometimes her Indian accent drifts into a German sounding dialect.

The dialog is extremely expository and precise, and the actors do a remarkable job of delivering all the exact locations while moving the furniture to create the next scene, which keeps the action always moving ahead.

Except for Fogg, all the actors play other characters, but the imaginative Jef Canter plays around 28 distinct characters with 33 costume changes.

From a Scottish boatman, to an Indian judge, to a western cowboy and a mumbling mountain man named Mudge, and many more, Canter plays them all.

He also had a little fun with an audience member in an improvised bit that works beautifully.

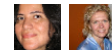
Occasionally a few words were missed Sunday and the actors paused and scrambled to find their place, but that is understandable in this madcap show that rarely lets up and never loses its way.

Physical details abound to sweep us along, like bouncing and jostling to represent a train in motion, the swaying of riding an elephant, and imitating the surging motion of a typhoon so well I felt a little dizzy, with technical direction by Steve Mountzoures.

The sea spray from squirt guns is a nice, whimsical touch too.

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This terrific ensemble cast gives a dynamite performance that is full of inventiveness and loads of fun.

Take a trip around the world without leaving your seat at Playhouse on Park's colorful and entertaining "Around the World in 80 Days" running through Sunday, Oct. 2.

4 Stars

Theater: Playhouse on Park

Location: 244 Park Road, West Hartford

Production: Adapted by Mark Brown from the novel by Jules Verne. Directed by Russell Trezz.

Costume design by Jennifer Raskopf. Set design by Bob Phillips. Technical direction by Steve Mountzoures. Stage Manager Dawn Loveland. Lighting design by Will Lowry.

Running time: 2 hours plus a 15-minute intermission

Show Times: Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m. through Oct. 2.

Tickets: \$22.50 — \$32.50. Call the box office at 860-523-5900 ext. 10, or visit their website at www.playhouseonpark.org

ACTOR...CHARACTER

Russell Garrett ... Phileas Fogg

Aidan O'Shea ... Passepartout and others

Chris Mixon ... Detective Fix and others

Jef Canter ... Sir Francis Cromarty and others

Veronique Hurley ... Aouda and others

Posted by [Kory Loucks-Powell](#) at [7:47 AM](#)



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