

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Mousetrap

Agatha Christie

Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen and Adam Spiegel

Derby Theatre

21–26 April 2014

The longevity of *The Mousetrap* is one of the wonders of the modern world. Its popularity is as remarkable as ever, as signified by sell-out audiences this week at Derby Theatre which is hosting the current leg of the play's diamond anniversary tour.

So why is this country house murder mystery still pulling in the crowds?

When it first opened, Agatha Christie thought it might last eight months. Richard Attenborough and his wife Sheila Sim were in the first cast—yet they were not the only reason *The Mousetrap* took off in such astonishing fashion.

There was a buzz around the production and the fact that at the curtain call the audience were—and still are—encouraged not to reveal whodunnit meant theatregoers were clamouring to see it.

Let's not forget that for the past 40 years *The Mousetrap* has played in the relatively small St Martin's Theatre in the West End. It has also become something of a phenomenon for tourists. But that still goes only part of the way towards explaining its attraction.

It does not have the complexity of *Verdict*, considered by Mrs Christie as the best play she ever wrote, apart from the gripping courtroom drama *Witness for the Prosecution*; nor does it have a leading character such as Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective who has been brought to life in [Black Coffee](#), the author's first play which is also touring the country.

What *The Mousetrap* does have is a clever, well-thought-out plot which keeps the audience guessing right until the end before all the strands are neatly unravelled.

The play is set in Monkswell Manor, recently converted into a guest house by young couple Mollie and Giles Ralston. A number of guests turn up and they all turn out to be unpleasant or odd. Heavy snow means they are unable to leave the building.

Detective Sergeant Trotter arrives on skis and warns everyone that a murderer who has killed a woman in London is on his way. When one of the guests is found dead, it is apparent that the killer is already there.

All the cast give spirited performances, with only the occasional example of an overstated display in a production which could quite easily turn into a parody.

This touring version is not without its faults: some of the time it plods along and you yearn for director Ian Watt-Smith—a veteran who has directed the production four times at St Martin's—to inject some pace.

At one point in the second half, Giles Ralston rails at Trotter, “For God’s sake, get on with it!” it seems highly appropriate. Fortunately that is the signal for the production to race towards its unexpected conclusion.

That is not before all the characters are revealed to have a motive for murder and become suspicious of one another.

An attractive set, with an oak-panelled drawing room with unostentatious stained-glass windows—surprisingly the designer is not credited in the programme—provides the perfect location for the action.

Many of the audience left the theatre excitedly discussing the play’s *dénouement* and whether they had guessed who was the villain.

But the reason behind *The Mousetrap*’s popularity remains an enigma that not even Poirot or Miss Marple could solve.

**Reviewer:** [Steve Orme](#)