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40th Season Opens with Tony Winning Comedy *The 39 Steps*

(Endicott, NY) Cider Mill Playhouse is poised to open its 40th season of professional theatre with the celebrated, comedic spy thriller *The 39 Steps*, adapted by John Buchan from the Alfred Hitchcock film. The show runs September 10 through 27 with all performances at 7:30pm. "I like to describe the show as a spoof on Hitchcock that collides with Monty Python," describes Director Norm Johnson. "It's pure fun, highly energetic and engaging for the audience. Anyone looking for a good laugh, a chance to just forget a busy week or see actors working as a team to tell their story should enjoy their trip to the theatre."

Indeed, a finely tuned team is required as the show utilizes four cast members portraying dozens of characters. Very bored with his aimless life, Richard Hanney (Matt Musgrove) decides to go to the theatre. While there he meets a mysterious woman named Annabella Schmidt (Laura Brennan) who turns out to be a secret agent trying to save England from a mysterious foreign power. When she is murdered in his apartment, he finds himself accused and escapes to Scotland in hopes of completing her mission. And the adventure begins. Laura Brennan also plays the other two lovely ladies in the story, Margaret McTyte and Pamela Edwards, along with a maid and a policeman. Danny Lindgren and Josh Sedelmeyer, known simply as "Man 1" and "Man 2," portray all the other characters – too numerous to list!

The work involves a piece that is full of physical comedy, sight allusions, a touch of vaudeville, and at times the audience may wonder if the precisely choreographed comedy is improvisational. "The play requires an exceptionally strong cast due to its demands, and we're so pleased to have been able to attract professionals of this cast's caliber," shares Executive Artistic Director Gail Belokur. Matt Musgrove is a member of Actors' Equity Association and has worked on national tours, Off-Broadway (*We the People*), and regionally out of NYC, Seattle and Los Angeles – where his work received an Ovation Award. He also has film and national commercial credits. Playing opposite him, Laura Brennan (Anabella/Margaret/Pamela) is a recent Ithaca College graduate, originally from Pittsburgh, whose credits include *The Good Person of Setzuan*, *Far Away*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *Translations*. They are joined by Danny Lindgren, also a member of Actors' Equity Association, who appeared at CMP last spring as "Jimmy" in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Lindgren has also appeared regionally at Goodspeed Opera House, Ithaca Shakespeare Company, Ogunquit Playhouse and Glimmerglass Opera. Rounding out the cast is local favorite Josh Sedelmeyer, who has appeared at CMP in *Spamalot*, *Into the Woods*, *Stage Kiss* and most recently directed *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

"The play demands great stamina and imagination from the actors and the full production team," shares Johnson, who has extensive directing experience but makes his Cider Mill Playhouse directorial debut with this show. As director, Johnson is also key to the show's success. "I knew we needed someone who could guide the troupe of actors with great finesse and skill. Norm Johnson directs interactive, lively pieces often, so this piece is right up his alley," explains Artistic Director Gail Belokur. "And as each member of the cast had been a former student of Norm's, I knew we would have the tight-knit group required to successfully stage *The 39 Steps*." Johnson agrees, "All of the cast studied at Ithaca College and we all spoke the same 'language' right out of the gate. They knew me and what to expect and I know where they were coming from as actors and we got to skip the tentative 'getting to know you' period and drive straight into the meat of the work. It's been an absolute dream to get into the room with this cast every day."

To make it all work, the show requires a talented team of designers and technicians as well. "The show takes place in so many places that it has to be a flexible scenic design. Three of the four actors play so many roles that the costumer has to be a genius. Lighting and sound both have to help us sell each of these moments and have precise timing," explains Johnson. Taking on these challenges are Tyler M. Perry as Scenic and Lighting Designer (CMP shows include scenic and/or lighting design for all of last season),

Anna Grigo as Costume Designer (her debut at CMP was *Stage Kiss*), and Patrick Lachance as Sound Designer. Lachance, a recent graduate of Vassar who has most recently worked at Williamstown Theatre Festival, makes his CMP design debut. The Cider Mill Playhouse also welcomes Jessica McCoy as Production Stage Manager. McCoy is an experienced Equity Membership Candidate and graduate of Oklahoma City University. "The design and production team for this show is exceptional – a must for this play," shares Belokur. "We are fortunate to have grown in reputation enough to attract the level of theatre professionals involved in every aspect of this production. *The 39 Steps* is engaging, enriching and entertaining, and therefore a perfect opening production for our 40th season."

Cider Mill Playhouse is a non-profit, professional theatre company producing in a 254-seat, cabaret-style, modified thrust theater located in the same building as the regionally famous Cider Mill. CMP works under the Actors' Equity Association Guest Artist Tier II contract and is honored to receive season support from the New York State Council on the Arts and the United Cultural Fund administered by the Broome County Arts Council. Tickets for all Cider Mill Playhouse shows are available through the box office. CALL 607-748-7363, VISIT 2 S. Nanticoke Ave, Endicott, or CLICK www.cidermillplayhouse.org.

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