

Roxy's comedy '39 Steps' is a parody of the 1935 Hitchcock film

BY DAVID BURKE

Eagle correspondent

The phrases “Alfred Hitchcock” and “madcap farcical comedy” don’t usually intersect.

The exception is “The 39 Steps,” opening this week at Roxy’s Downtown, where the 1935 Hitchcock film is parodied with four performers taking on a multitude of roles – sometimes several at once.

“It’s been just a joy to direct, because I have four incredible talents in John Keckeisen, Madi White, Sam Warner and Andrew Walker,” director Rick Bumgardner said.

All but Keckeisen, who plays the hero Richard Hannay, play multiple roles. White plays three different femme fatales and Warner and Walker are referred to in the script as “clowns,” playing dozens of parts.

Bumgardner said rehearsing for the split-second timing of a farce has been as enjoyable as it has been challenging.

“Finding those timed moments is like choreographing,” he said. “It’s been a lot of fun and certainly it’s been a challenge for all of us.”

The 1930s film noir setting of “39 Steps” is aided by set designer Michael Downs, costumer Deb Campbell and lighting director Arthur Reese.

“I wanted it to look like we were backstage on a movie set, doing rehearsals of all these scenes,” Bumgardner said. “(Downs has) created a visually wonderful looking set that utilizes ladders and blocks and all kind of things that metamorphose into other pieces.”

For Hitchcock fans, the script and the action contain many visual and verbal references to the legendary filmmaker’s works.

“It’s a game we’re going to play with the audience,” Bum-

‘THE 39 STEPS’

When: Through Feb. 28; performances at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays

Where: Roxy’s Downtown, 412 ½ E. Douglas

Tickets: \$45 for dinner and show, \$30 for show only, by calling 316-265-4400 or online at roxysdowntown.com

gardner said.

“The 39 Steps” has been challenging but enjoyable for himself and the cast, Bumgardner said.

The other night, he recalled, Warner said “thank you for this incredible opportunity to – play.”

“He was thinking of the right word. We’ve just been playing for three weeks of rehearsal,” the director said. “It’s been so much fun to tap into every creative aspect we can get into.”

Each performer has been suggesting additions to the action, Bumgardner said, and trying to see whether it succeeds or fails.

“It’s been fun for me as a director to watch them, because they do continue to grow, they do continue to find bits and find things,” he said. “And all of their choices, because of who they are as people and the fact that we’ve worked together before, are within what the character would choose to do at this moment.”

That teamwork is one of the hallmarks of the show, he said.

“There’s nothing I like more than creative collaboration, and it has been great fun for me with these four people to be collaborating this way,” Bumgardner added.