

## Looking for Clues, And Laughs

### A whodunit set in a stately country home full of booby traps.

First, a confession: If every murder mystery ever dreamed up for the stage, the screen or the library were suddenly to go missing, I would hardly notice.

Don't get me wrong — some of my best friends are fans of detective fiction in all its forms. But I've always found it silly: A character I don't know or care about dies at the start, a series of shifty but ultimately innocent suspects leads me astray in the middle, and a ridiculously far-fetched solution leaves me feeling like I've been had at the end.

This may make me the perfect audience for "Something's Afoot," the "musical whodunit" in which the unseen Lord Rancour is murdered, his weekend visitors and the house staff all seem to have plausible motives until one by one they are dispatched themselves, and the true culprit is — don't worry, this is no spoiler! — ridiculously far-fetched. Except here, it's meant as jest, not genre.

Goodspeed Musicals typically presents elaborate Broadway hits painstakingly downsized to fit the jewel-box dimensions of its East Haddam theater (and the confines of its budgets). "Something's Afoot," by contrast, seems tailor-made for the intimate scale of the Goodspeed Opera House, and that's because it was. The group that created it — James McDonald, David Vos and Robert Gerlach, with additional input from Ed Linderman — brought it to Goodspeed in 1973, where it was warmly received. Over the next three years, by fits and starts, this parody of Agatha Christie-style mysteries made its way to Broadway, where the warmth dissipated and the show closed in less than two months.

The creators don't seem to have written another Broadway musical, and strictly on the merits, this may not be a bad thing. The songs in "Something's Afoot" are utterly undistinguished, and

many of the jokes fall flat. But the show is loopy and fun, and even garnered an Olivier Award nomination for best musical in London. And now it's back home at Goodspeed in a charming, kinetic production conceived by Casey Hushion and directed and choreographed by Vince Pesce.

Adrian W. Jones has designed a grandly imposing entry hall for the stately country home of the now permanently absent Lord Rancour. It's complete with ancestral portraits, secret compartments and enough multi-function bric-a-brac — booby traps if you prefer — to do in a houseful of guests. As they arrive, decked out in Tracy Christensen's cliché-happy 1930s costumes — plaid Sherlock Holmes cape for the amateur detective, Miss Tweed; pith helmet for the Army man, Colonel Gillweather; pastel party dress for the ingénue, Hope — so does a major storm. (Last weekend's audience, awaiting the

**HMMM . . .** Audrie Neenan as Miss Tweed, the sleuth.

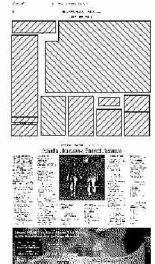
arrival of Hurricane Sandy, got an extra chortle out of that.) We don't need the ominous organ chords and eerie sound effects of Jay Hilton to tell us that power will go out, roads will flood, escape will become impossible.

But I, for one, was happy to be trapped for a couple of acts in the vinegary company of Audrie Neenan, wagging an accusatory finger, raising a dubious eyebrow and curling a skeptical lip with irresistible gusto as Miss Tweed. As she tries to unravel the increasingly bizarre murders taking place at Rancour's Retreat, her fellow suspects and victims cheerfully swig sherry and become increasingly, well, clueless.

They include Julia Osborne's perpetually sunny Hope, Ron Wisniski's stentorian butler, Clive, and Lynne Wintersteller's grasping society matron, Lady Grace. I especially liked Ed Dixon's hilariously puffed-up Colonel Gillweather and Benjamin Eakeley's snakelike Nigel the Dissolute Nephew.

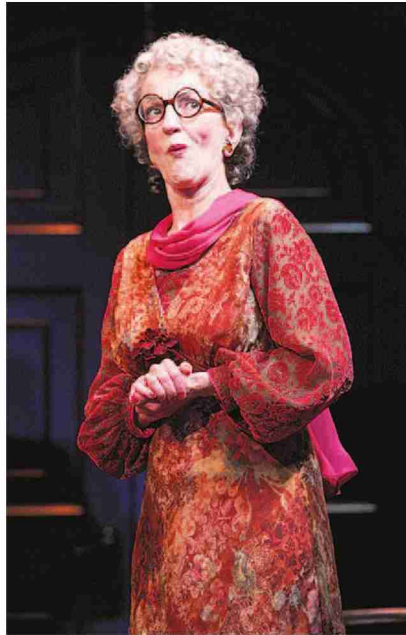
#### THEATER REVIEW

SYLVIANE  
GOLD



Mr. Eakeley's gymnastic performance — draping himself over the balcony, leaping onto the mantel — is a vivid reminder that Mr. Pesce began as a dancer and honed his choreography talents assisting Kathleen Marshall on Broadway hits like "Anything Goes" and "The Pajama Game." But he clearly knows how to get what he needs from his actors and the admittedly thin material. "Something's Afoot" keeps bubbling along on the strength of its ingratiating performers and its gleeful insistence that only a fool would care who-dunit.

"Something's Afoot," by James McDonald, David Vos and Robert Gerlach with additional music and lyrics by Ed Linderman, is at the Goodspeed Opera House, 6 Main Street, East Haddam, through Dec. 9. Information at 860-873-8668 or [www.goodspeed.org](http://www.goodspeed.org).



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANE SOBOLIEWSKI

**SHOCKING!**  
The cast of "Something's Afoot" at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, a musical that was first performed there in 1973 to a warm reception. The new production was conceived by Casey Hushion and directed and choreographed by Vince Pesce.