

Suspense Thrillers

by Wade Bradford

5 Unlike mysteries in which the audience searches for clues to figure out “whodunit,” thrillers let viewers know who the bad guys are in advance. Then, the audience spends the rest of the play on the edge of their proverbial seats wondering who will win: the evil doer or the innocent victim?

Here are five of the best stage thrillers in theatrical history:

***Wait Until Dark* by Frederick Knott**

10 In this slick, slightly dated cat-and-mouse thriller, three con-men manipulate a blind woman.

They want the secret contents hidden inside a mysterious doll, and they are willing to go to any lengths to retrieve it – even murder.

15 Fortunately, the blind protagonist, Suzy Hendrix, is resourceful enough to use her other heightened senses to combat the criminals. In the climatic final act, Suzy gains the advantage when she shuts off all the lights in her apartment. Then, the bad guys are in her territory!

***Deathtrap* by Ira Levin**

20 A reviewer from Cue Magazine calls Levin’s comic suspense play, “two thirds a thriller and one-third a devilishly clever comedy.” And the play is indeed devilish! The premise: a formerly successful author is so desperate for another hit; he seems willing to murder a younger more talented writer in order to steal his brilliant manuscript. But that’s only the beginning!

Plot twists and treachery abound throughout *Deathtrap*. Try to see this one live at your local community theatre.

25 However, if you can’t wait for it to be revived, the Michael Caine film is a fun ride as well.

***Dial M for Murder* by Frederick Knott**

Another “Knotty” thriller, this play became an instant theatrical hit as well as an Alfred Hitchcock classic.

30 Believing that he has planned the perfect crime, a cold-hearted husband hires a thug to murder his wife.

The audience members hold their breath as they watch to see what happens next. Will the husband get away with the heinous deed? Will the wife survive? (Don’t hold your breath for too long – the play runs about two hours!)

***Perfect Crime* by Warren Manzi**

This show is currently the longest running play in New York City history. This off-Broadway thriller has been running since 1987. Believe it or not, lead actress Catherine Russell has starred in *Perfect Crime* since its premiere. That means she performed in over 8,000 shows – missing a mere four performances during the last twenty years. (Can a person stay sane after all those performances???)

I have not seen *Perfect Crime* yet, so I'll let the press release speak for itself: "The main character is a Harvard-educated psychiatrist accused of bumping off her wealthy British husband. The play is set in an affluent Connecticut town where this suspected murderess conducts her practice out of her secluded mansion. The handsome detective assigned to the case must overcome his own love-interest in the wife as he seeks to discover who murdered the husband, if indeed he was murdered at all." Sounds like a good combination of suspense and romance.

***The Bad Seed* by Maxwell Anderson**

Based upon the novel by William March, *The Bad Seed* asks a disturbing question. Are some people born evil? Eight-year old Rhoda Penmark seems to be.

To me, this play is seriously disturbing. Rhoda behaves sweetly and innocently around adults, but can be murderously devious during one-on-one encounters. I can't recall a play in which such a young child is portrayed as such a manipulative sociopath. The psychopathic Rhoda makes the creepy ghost girl from *The Ring* look like a Strawberry Shortcake.

proverbial	pověstný
cat-and-mouse	hra na kočku a myš
con-men	podvodníci
to go to any lengths	udělat cokoliv pro něco
to retrieve	získat zpět
resourceful	vynalézavý
devilish	dábelský
treachery	proradnost
to abound	oplývat, překypovat
heinous	hnusný
to bump off	oddělat
affluent	majetný
secluded	nerušený, v ústraní
devious	záluďný