

LAKE TAHOE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

LAKE TAHOE OUTDOOR ARENA AT HARVEYS

PRESENTED BY  LG Business Solutions



OLD DOMINION
ANDY GRAMMER

JULY 17

ON SALE
FRIDAY, JANUARY 31

FOR COMPLETE LINEUP AND TO PURCHASE
TICKETS VISIT TICKETMASTER.COM
OR APECONCERTS.COM

Harrah's HARVEYS
LAKE TAHOE

HarveysTahoe.com    #TahoeConcerts

Shows subject to change or cancellation. Must be 21 or older to gamble. Know When To Stop Before You Start.® Gambling Problem? Call 1-800-522-4700. ©2020, Caesars License Company, LLC.



The cast of *Murder on the Orient Express* perform a scene at Reno Little Theater.

PHOTO/ERIC MARKS

All aboard

A kidnapped child, a dead body and a snowbound train—you wouldn't think these events would be funny, but they are when you cross Agatha Christie's seminal whodunit with Ken Ludwig, a prolific farceur who wrote its stage version, currently appearing at Reno Little Theater.

Ludwig was actually handpicked by the Christie estate to be the first playwright allowed to adapt *Murder on the Orient Express* for the stage, which he did in 2017. Though Ludwig is known for his slapstick adaptations, this play is respectful of Christie's original story, while also mindful of modern-day audiences' needs.

As much as I love a juicy murder mystery and believe Agatha Christie was a genius of her time, I'm also the first to admit that her books can be dull at times. There are endless scenes involving sleuths questioning suspects, with very little else happening for chapters, not to mention the incessant need to beat a dead horse by sharing every minor detail of the crime ad nauseum after the culprit is revealed. Her work can stand some updating, and Ludwig admirably keeps the action chugging along, with snappy dialogue, swift pacing and a more manageable cast of characters.

The story is set in motion when Inspector Hercule Poirot (played by Scott Hernandez), the prissy, mustachioed French detective, hops aboard the Orient Express traveling from Istanbul to Calais. On board, he meets a motley set of travelers; the conductor, Michel (Scott Sami); and Monsieur Bouc (Jeff Chamberlin), the director of the railway—11 passengers total.

The travelers, for the most part, are pure stereotypes. There's Princess Dragomiroff (Evonne Kezios), the Russian princess traveling with her missionary assistant, Greta Ohlsson (Libby Bakke). There's Helen Hubbard (Moir Bengochea), the annoyingly talkative

American woman with a string of former husbands. There's the mysterious and beautiful Miss Debenham (Madeline Bennett), a former nanny, and her secret lover, the Scottish Colonel Arbuthnot (Caulder Temple); the Hungarian Countess Andrenyi (Deanna Podstawa), who also mysteriously has medical training; and a crude American mobster, Samuel Ratchett (Bryce Keil), traveling with his stuttering idiot of a secretary, Hector (Brian Ault).

The ride gets bumpy when a snowstorm strands the train on the tracks, a passenger winds up dead, and Poirot steps up to solve the mystery of how a murder could take place when all the other passengers' whereabouts seem to have been accounted for.

Some of Ludwig's choices, though made in the interest of moving things along, result in head-scratchers. How, for example, does he excuse letting one of the suspects work with Poirot to solve the case? And there were some issues with accents and pacing, though these surely have improved since the pre-opening sneak preview I caught. None of this dampens the fun. Hernandez's Poirot, it should be noted, is perfection.

The hilarious one-liners almost outdo the gorgeous set, outfitted as two train cars complete with bunks, doors and steam spewing. Marvelous lighting design creates the illusion of a snowstorm. The combined effect is ... ahem ... transporting. □

Murder on the Orient Express



Written by Agatha Christie, adapted for the stage by Ken Ludwig and directed by Melissa Taylor. At Reno Little Theater, 147 E. Pueblo St., on Jan. 30, 31, Feb. 1, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14 and 15 at 7:30 p.m.; and Feb. 2, 9 and 16 at 2 p.m. Tickets: \$25 adult, \$20 seniors 60+ and military; \$15 students. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.renolittletheater.org or call 813-8900.