

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*

Show Summary

Relaxed Performance: Tue 6 May 7:00pm

Pre-show Demonstration: Tue 6 May 6:30pm

Auckland Theatre Company presents

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*

Adapted for the Stage by Ken Ludwig

It's the winter of 1934 and the luxurious Orient Express is travelling through the night on its way from Istanbul to London, when a snowdrift stops the train in its tracks. In the first-class carriage is Hercule Poirot, the famous Belgian detective, returning home from an 'unfortunate' murder case.

This show summary will give a synopsis of the show's plot, and include details about lighting, sound, surprises, and startling moments. However, during live theatre unpredictable events, action, and changes may occur.

Included in the show summary are photos from the dress rehearsal, to help you know what to expect during the show. The pre-show demonstration at 6:30pm on Tuesday 6 May will go into even more detail about what to expect, inviting you inside the theatre to check out the show elements live.

Production Notes:

How do we move from scene to scene? Across the play, action occurs in multiple locations in a train. From scene to scene the outside of the train is visible

The “Murder Mystery Moments”: At approximately 5 key moments across the play, the action briefly pauses while distinctive sound and lighting sequences "snap" in and out quickly to highlight important plot developments, clues or revelations that Poirot discovers. These stylised effects are part of the theatrical storytelling but may be surprising for those sensitive to sudden lighting or sound changes.

A note on doors: Sometimes the actors pretend that there are three doors in front of the sleeping rooms. At other times, a real wall with three doors is in place.

A note on Spoilers:

This document includes spoilers. If you don't want to know details about the show, don't read any further.

Reach out to Sam Phillips, Auckland Theatre Company's Head of Learning and Participation, on sam@atc.co.nz. Sam will also be at the ASB Waterfront Theatre on Tuesday 6 May, and will present the pre-show demonstration at 6.30pm.

After the show: Don't tell whodunnit! Don't tell the identity of the culprit—keep the mystery alive for everyone.

Show Summary:

At the beginning of the play, a large red curtain is in front of the stage.

There is haze in the air from a fog machine.

Most audience lights will go dark when the show begins. Loud train noises and engine sounds play, which lasts for 20 seconds.

After 20 seconds of darkness, a projected poster reading “*Murder on the Orient Express*” appears, accompanied by a loud cello musical note.



Opening Prologue:

Loud voices speak in the darkness; a young girl is being tucked into bed by her mother.

A silhouette of a door opens, and the shadow of a figure is shown. The figure scares the young girl as he approaches her. The girl screams very loudly, and the scene ends

A very bright light bulb appears on the stage, shining onto the stage. The front few rows of the theatre will also be covered in light. Detective Hercule Poirot enters and is silhouetted by the light.

He walks towards the audience, and a black cloth covers the stage. Poirot directly addresses us, the audience, and tells us the story we are about to see is his most difficult case.



Inside a Turkish restaurant:

The curtain lifts to show a Turkish restaurant. Music plays.

Colonel Arbuthnot and Mary Debenham talk about what's going to happen and agree to leave to another restaurant around the corner.

Poirot is recalling a recent case. As he says, "Perhaps I pushed the man too far to confess his guilt", and a loud gunshot is heard, but no one responds. Perhaps it's only in Poirot's memory...

The waiter comes in to tell Poirot that the train is full, and Monsieur Bouc, the train's owner, tells him to open a room for him.



Outside the train

Music, combined with the sound of a chugging train, plays loudly as the lights go out, and the exterior of the train lowered down onto the stage.

The passengers arrive one by one, and board the train.

Throughout the scene there are occasional sounds of a train engine, and a smoke effect fills the theatre.

Bouc and Poirot enter the train, and the lights dim. Projections of snow starts to fall across the whole stage.



Inside the dining car

The passengers enter the dining car.

Ratchett forces Poirot to sit & chat; Ratchett has an enemy who has been sending him threatening letters.

Poirot leaves, and Ratchett encounters Countess Andrenyi. Andrenyi tries to pass him in the corridor, and Ratchett pesters her. Andrenyi slaps Ratchett across the face and passes her.

The train starts moving with a jolt, accompanied by a loud mechanical clunking sound. Outside the window, the mountains start to move.



Inside the sleeping car

Outside the train, passengers walk up and down the corridor. There is loud music and the sound of the train chugging along.

Michele the waiter and Helen Hubbard are on the phone, and Hubbard orders drinks and snacks. After hanging up, Hubbard sings and dances loudly in her room, angering Ratchett.

Ratchett bangs on their adjoining wall, yelling at her to be quiet. Helen finds Ratchett's gun.



The Comms Cabin:

Lights darken and the train thunders.

Outside the train, projected snow falls.

Michel makes a call to Belgrade Station, warning that they are in an emergency and need help. The voice on the other end of the phone is loud, but the line crackles and goes dead.

There is only static from the phone, and Michel slams the phone back on the holder.



Observation Deck:

Mary and Colonel Arbuthnot are in an Observation Deck on the train.

They take a quiet moment to kiss, but they're interrupted by Hector MacQueen.

The Train suddenly screeches to a halt; the train has hit a snowdrift.

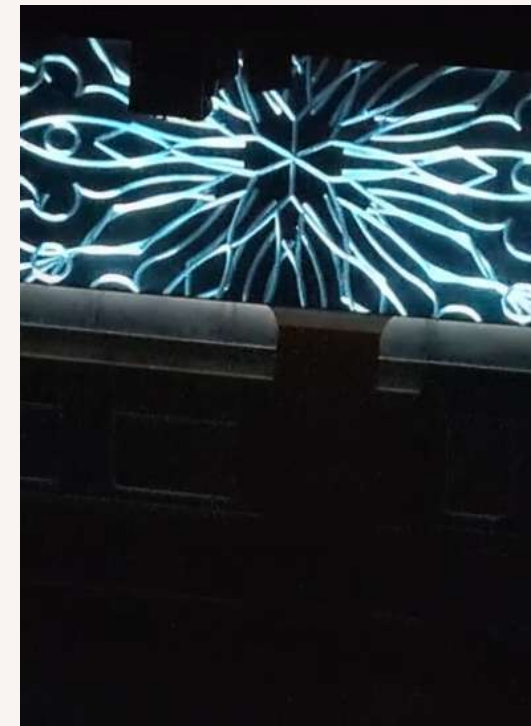
MacQueen leaves Mary and the Colonel alone, and swirling music plays as the couple kiss.



Corridor of the Sleeping Car late at night:

Hubbard screams for help from inside her room. She complains that there was a man inside her room. She asks Bouc for help, and he agrees to look into it. Poirot comes out of his room to see what's happening. Bouc says that the train has stopped moving.

Night passes in the Orient Express. An art deco-style snowflake is projected above the stage.



Corridor of the Sleeping Car the next morning:

MacQueen, Princess Dragomiroff and Greta Ohlsson are in the corridor, when MacQueen has trouble getting into Ratchett's room. Poirot and Bouc join them, and Bouc breaks down the door to reveal...



Inside the Sleeping Car:

The corridor doors lift out to show the dead body of Ratchett, lying in his bed. On the reveal of his body, there is a loud and surprising “Murder Mystery Moment”: there is the sound of a train screeching, a dramatic lighting effect, and projected art deco static.

Ohlsson screams loudly and drops the breakfast tray with a crash which makes another loud sound as it crashes to the floor.



Inside the Sleeping Car (cont.):

Poirot examines the body, and Bouc pleads with Poirot to investigate Ratchett's death. MacQueen comes back with Andrenyi, who helps to examine the body for clues. Poirot pokes a pencil into each of the eight stab wounds.

Poirot discovers Ratchett's gun, which he hands to Bouc. Bouc waves the gun around and the others flinch, and Poirot takes it off him.

Poirot discovers a smashed pocket watch in Ratchett's pocket, displaying the time it was broken.

As Andrenyi picks up a handkerchief, and a 3-second 'Murder Mystery Moment' effect plays out. Loud cello and surprising lighting draws attention to the handkerchief.



Inside the Sleeping Car (cont.):

Bouc goes to throw the ash in the ashtray out of the window, but Poirot shouts at him to stop. Poirot finds a scrap of paper with some writing on it. Countess leaves and returns with a hatbox.

Poirot reveals hidden words written on the scrap of paper. “Remember Little Daisy Armstrong” is shown written on the paper; which the audience sees projected above the train, accompanied by loud music and lighting.

As Poirot recalls the story of little Daisy Armstrong, we hear a loud, voice of Daisy shouting out for “Mummy... Daddy”.

MacQueen returns with a letter.



As we move to the Dining Car:

Poirot steps off the train and comes towards the audience, committing to solving the murder. The train doors close and projected snowflakes appear across the top of the stage.

Bouc, the Countess and MacQueen appear through the train windows as Poirot remains at the front of the stage, a spotlight shining on him.



The Dining Car:

The Interrogations Commence

Inside the dining car Dragomiroff and Ohlsson are being interrogated by Poirot, as Bouc watches on. Dragomiroff smokes a cigarette and reveals she knows the real identity of Ratchett: he's actually Bruno Cassetti, who murdered Daisy Armstrong.

Ohlsson rushes out upset, and Dragomiroff runs after her.

MacQueen is investigated by Poirot, observed by Bouc. MacQueen reveals Daisy's father, Colonel Armstrong, committed suicide.

MacQueen tells he saw a second conductor. Hector is dismissed, and Poirot asks him to call Michel to the dining car.



The Dining Car:

The Interrogations Continue

Poirot and Bouc are conferring, but are interrupted by Hubbard who demands an apology. When Hubbard shows a button she found, there is a 'Murder Mystery Moment', with a loud burst of cello, a striking lighting and projector effect.

While Hubbard is being interrogated, Arbuthnot interrupts looking for Mary.

A loud scream is heard from the Sleeping Car, followed by a very loud gunshot which surprises Poirot, Arbuthnot, Hubbard, and Bouc. Arbuthnot announces that the scream belongs to Mary.



Travel to the Sleeping Car:

Poirot rushes through the train to investigate the gunshot in the Sleeping Car.

There is a loud and surprising sequence to transition from the Dining Car to the Sleeping Car to investigate the gunshot. The things to expect in this sequence are:

- Very loud cello music playing, very loud train engine noises. The train engine noises are felt across the theatre.
- Lighting changes: the train is covered in blue light, and Poirot comes to the front of the stage and is lit from the side.
- Characters voices have an echo effect and are very loud.
- Strobe lighting effects and projected lights across the stage,
- All characters running across the stage a lot, and move in abstract ways, pointing in different directions, as if running through the train searching for Mary.



Interval:

Michel and Colonel Arbuthnot smash through the door of the sleeping car. The doors lift up and out, showing the interior of the sleeping compartments. Helen Hubbard screams and the lights go out quickly.

The red curtain has returned.

The audience lights will come on, and you can take a break, use the toilet, and get a drink or snack from the bar, or remain in your seat. You can use the breakout space to relax away from the crowds. The break will last about 15 minutes.

During the interval, if you are in the foyer you will hear a recorded “bing bong” sound and an announcement to return to your seats.

When the performance is ready to begin, audience lights will fade down.



Act Two

The Sleeping Car Continued:

After interval houselights go dark and loud ominous music plays for 30 seconds, with the sound of a chugging train playing alongside.

The curtain lifts up to reveal Mary Debenham surrounded by passengers. Mary has been shot in the arm, but is alive.

Countess Andrenyi attends to Mary's wounds, as Mary winces in pain. Mary is emotional as she recounts how she saw Ratchett's body. Her voice grows in volume.

Poirot inspects Helen Hubbard's bag, and finds the bloody knife, and another 'Murder Mystery Moment' occurs. Helen Hubbard loudly exclaims.

The doors of the sleeping cars come down, and as the characters exit, a spotlight remains on Poirot, which slowly goes out as the exterior of the train enters from left and right.



The Comms Cabin:

Michel attempts to make a call to Belgrade Station, warning that they are in an emergency due to the weather and need help. We hear static from the phone and Michel slams the phone back on the holder.

In the transition back to the dining car, there are loud cello and train rumbling sounds.



The Dining Car:

The train opens again as the dining car comes forward, with Poirot sitting. Bouc rushes into the car, and they discuss the case so far. Poirot gets flustered, exclaiming that he has no more suspects.

The Colonel and Mary Debenham enter, and Poirot dismisses the Colonel. He interrogates Mary. When Mary leaves, Bouc and Poirot argue about Mary, as Poirot thinks she is lying and her wounds are self-inflicted, but Bouc disagrees and insists she is innocent.



The Dining Car Cont.

Poirot inspects Michel's conductor's jacket for a missing button. Michel explains there cannot be another conductor wearing the same uniform on the train. Poirot runs around the car, loudly exclaiming his excitement at finding more information, as he exits with Michel.

Helen Hubbard is in discussion with Bouc, when they are interrupted by Michel and Greta Ohlsson yelling in distress, urging them to not go through her private belongings as Michel returns with her personal bags.

Princess Dragomiroff pulls out the second conductor's jacket from Greta Ohlsson's bag, accompanied by the "Murder Mystery Moment" sound and lighting effect.



The Dining Car Cont.

Countess Andrenyi enters, underscored by music and a chugging train sound that builds underneath their conversation.

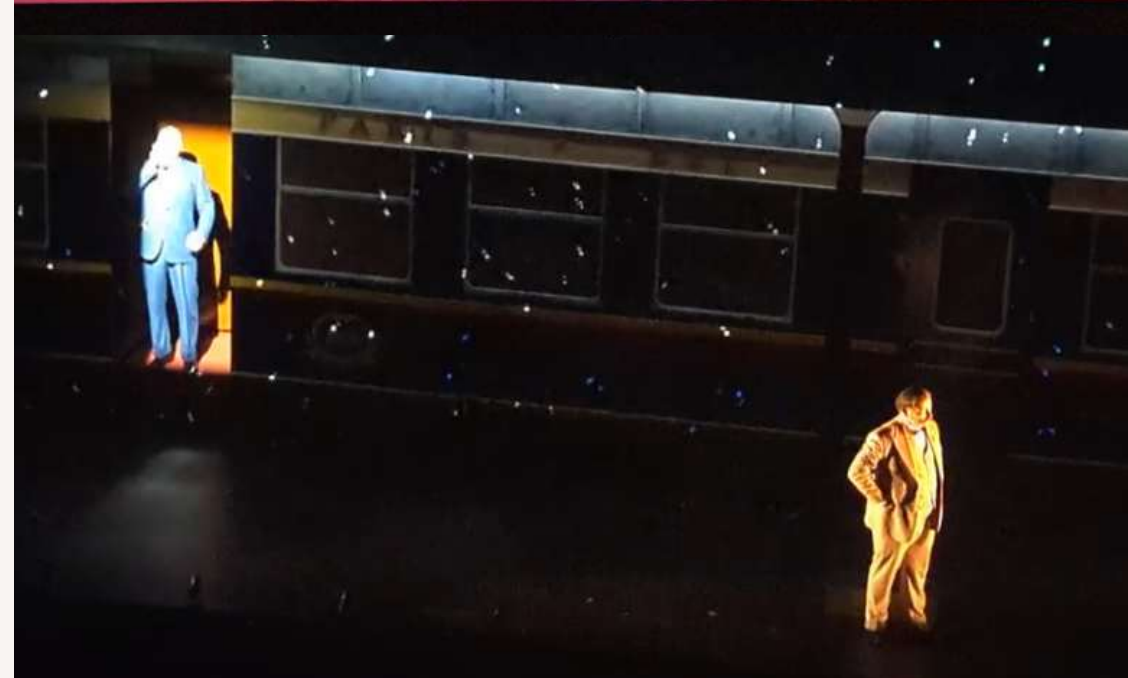
Poirot interrogates the Countess about her real identity. He announces she is actually the Aunt of Daisy Armstrong.

The Countess' accent changes to her native American, and she becomes emotional, yelling at Poirot trying to plead her innocence. The Countess storms out, and the lights go down.

There is faint light on Poirot, who steps forward off the Train. Mysterious music begins to swell.

The doors of the sleeping cars comes down, and the sound of sobbing begins. The train opens, and a light shines showing Linda Arden, formally pretending to be the Countess crying.

The comms room opens again on the left of the train car, as Bouc converses with Belgrade station.



The Dining Car: The Reveal

Mysterious music plays; all the passengers are waiting inside the dining car.

Poirot steps into the dining cart. He interrogates the Colonel and starts to yell at both the Colonel and Mary Debenham. The Colonel grabs Poirot by the collar, and goes to punch him but is held back by Mary.

Poirot summarises the potential series of events that led to the murder: the killer must be one of the characters currently in the dining car. Ominous cello sounds play.



The Dining Car: The Reveal (cont.)

The lights suddenly turn blue, with a yellow spotlight remaining on Poirot. Poirot recounts the timeline and clues since he got on the train, as he begins to tell which character is the killer.

As Poirot speaks, the other characters re-enact their key moments.

This sequence includes pre-recorded loud sounds of the train screeching, and pre-recorded screams from Greta. The sequence also includes three recordings of Mary's loud scream and gunshot, accompanied by a snap lighting effect. These sounds are reenactments of the moment Mary Debenham was shot.



The Dining Car: The Reveal (cont.)

Mysterious music builds as Poirot tells how each of the passengers are connected to Daisy Armstrong.

Poirot reveals the murderer.

Lighting changes to be dim and colourful, and the passengers form a line along the front of the stage. There are lights below them, casting large shadow on the train set.

Music grows loudly, as all the passengers make a stabbing gesture one-by-one into the air. Red dust appears at the point where they stab.



The Dining Car: The Reveal (cont.)

The passengers reason with Poirot about the nature of justice.

Loud engine noise starts, and the train suddenly begins moving again. Poirot moves to the front of the stage, as the dining car with the other characters moves back. The lights on the dining car go down, and Poirot remains in light on stage, and recounts what happened with the characters after the Orient Express.

At the end of the play, the audience will clap and cheer.

The actors will bow, and point to a projected image that says “Don’t Tell Whodunit!”. “Don’t Tell Whodunit!” means we want the audience members to keep the secret of who did the murder in the play.

