

Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express

Adapted for the Stage by Ken Ludwig

Relaxed Performance Show Information

Show Information

This thrilling mystery takes place aboard the famous Orient Express train in the winter of 1934. The story follows renowned Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, played by Cameron Rhodes, as he becomes involved in an unexpected murder investigation.

The principal action of the play takes place in 1934 aboard the Orient Express as it travels from Istanbul to Western Europe.

When the train becomes stranded in a snowdrift, a passenger is discovered dead in their compartment. With no footprints leading away in the snow, Poirot realizes the killer must still be on the train. The detective must use his reasoning to identify the murderer among the remaining passengers.

This stage adaptation by Ken Ludwig brings Agatha Christie's classic mystery to life with suspense, intrigue, and moments of unexpected humour as Poirot works to solve the case before the train reaches its destination.

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

You can watch the full show via this link: [WATCH DRESS REHEARSAL ON YOUTUBE](#)

Key Details

Location: ASB Waterfront Theatre, 138 Halsey Street, Auckland Central, Auckland 1010. Entry through the glass doors on Halsey Street.

Step free access, and wheelchair accessible seating and toilets available.

[ASB Waterfront Theatre's "Know Before You Go" page with arrival info.](#)

Time: 2 hours and 10 minutes, with a 15-minute interval.

Date: The relaxed performance on Tuesday 6 May is at 7pm. For the relaxed performance there is no lockout policy, and the internal theatre doors will remain open for the whole show.

Pre-show Demonstration

Before the show starts on Tuesday 6 May, we will have a pre-show demonstration on stage at **6.30pm**. Please meet at the Breakout Room on Level One, and we will travel into the theatre together. The demo will introduce the lighting, sound, special effects, surprises, and characters, and we will talk about what the show will be like. We will also talk about how the relaxed show will work.

This document will give you even more details about the show.

Relaxed show features

During the relaxed performance, the audience may come and go, move around, visit breakout spaces, and use comfort and fidget items. If you need to leave during the show and then come back, please return to your same seat. Please don't go onto the stage with the performers.

There are two sets of doors leading into the theatre: internal doors and external doors. The internal doors (those directly entering the auditorium) will remain open throughout the performance. The external doors (the first set you encounter from the foyer) will remain closed but unlocked.

You can leave the theatre at any time. To come back into the theatre, an usher will let you in when it's okay to return. You might have to wait outside the closed external doors for a moment. This arrangement helps maintain a balance between accessibility and minimizing light and sound disruptions. If you'd like assistance to come and go, please let theatre staff know.

If you need to use devices for accessibility, please put them on silent. At the start of the show, the whole audience will be reminded with an announcement that during the relaxed performance it's ok for the audience to be themselves.

Lighting

The auditorium lights will be on dimly throughout the show, so the auditorium will never be entirely dark. There is lighting along the stairs and railings.

The lighting uses a combination of theatrical stage lighting, spotlights, and projections to create the atmosphere of a 1930s murder mystery. There are several sudden lighting changes throughout the performance. Key moments are:

- At key moments when an important clue is discovered, there is a “Murder Mystery Moment” which includes sudden bright lighting changes and strobing projected effects

- Lights go completely dark at certain dramatic moments
- **Opening scene:** The show begins in darkness and then the stage lights turn on
- At the start of the play there is a startling lighting effect where a bright fog light that could belong to the front of a train hurtles towards the audience, and the front section of the seating block will have lights in their eyes.
- **Train exterior scenes:** Blue lighting with projected snowfall effects
- **Act One finale/Pre-interval:** Contains a sequence with intense lighting including:
 - Blue lighting across the train
 - Lights shining from the left and right sides of the stage
 - Strobe lighting effects
 - Projected lights moving across the stage

Sound

The sound features a combination of pre-recorded music, sound effects, and amplified dialogue to create an immersive 1930s murder mystery atmosphere. The sound design includes period-appropriate music, train sound effects, and dramatic musical cues that enhance the storytelling. Several sudden, loud sound effects occur throughout the performance. The train engine sounds sometimes include heavy bass that can be felt physically. Actors' voices have an echo effect applied during key moments. The Act One finale sequence includes particularly intense sound design with loud music and train sounds.

Pre-Show, Interval, and Post-Show Music

Gentle 1930s jazz and orchestral pieces play before the show and during interval at a moderate volume, with the production's orchestral theme returning for post-show music.

Sound Effects and Music During the Show

- **Opening sequence:** The show begins in darkness with 20 seconds of a very loud train whistle and the roar of a steam engine
- **Turkish restaurant scene:** Loud musical track plays
- **Poirot's memory:** A loud gunshot sound effect that represents a memory rather than an actual event
- **Train atmosphere:** Throughout the production, there are recurring train sounds including:
 - Engine chugging and rumbling (sometimes with heavy bass that can be felt in the theatre)

- Train whistles and screeching brakes
- Engine smoke effects are accompanied by mechanical sounds

Other Significant Sound Moments

- Loud scream from Helen Hubbard (when she claims to have seen a man in her room)
- Door slamming sounds (particularly during Helen Hubbard and Ratchett's argument)
- Static from telephone in communications cabin (when Michel attempts to call Belgrade Station)
- Breakfast tray crash: A breakfast tray is dropped and crashes to the floor when Ratchett's body is discovered (Act One)
- Very loud gunshot when Mary is shot (near the end of Act One, then repeated three times during the reveal in Act Two)
- Amplified sobbing sounds during transition scenes
- Mysterious music that builds in volume during revelation scenes (particularly during Poirot's final explanation)
- Loud scream from Greta and crashing breakfast tray when Ratchett's body is discovered
- Loud train screeching when the train suddenly stops due to the snowdrift
- Daisy Armstrong's echo-y voice calling for "Mummy... Daddy" during Poirot's recollection of her story

Special Effects

Special effects include atmospheric elements, projections, and practical stage effects to enhance the storytelling experience.

Atmospheric Effects

- **Engine smoke:** During scenes outside the train, fog fills parts of the theatre to create the atmosphere of a steam locomotive

Projections and Visual Effects

- **Opening projections:** A movie-poster style "Murder on the Orient Express" projection appears at the beginning

- **Shadow effects:** Silhouette effects are used in the opening scene showing a figure approaching a young girl's bed
- **Projected snow and snowflakes:** Snow visibly falls across the stage during exterior train scenes and can be seen through the train windows during interior scenes. Art deco-style snowflake projections appear above the stage during overnight transition scenes

Murder Mystery Moments

- At approximately 5 key moments across the play, there are what we call "Murder Mystery Moments" in our show summary. These distinctive sound and lighting sequences highlight key plot developments or clues that Poirot discovers.
- The action briefly pauses while lighting and sound effects draw attention to important revelations or dramatic turns in the story. These stylised effects "snap" in and out quickly, signalling the significance of what's happening.
- While part of the theatrical storytelling, knowing about these moments can help prepare you if you're sensitive to sudden lighting or sound changes. These specials highlight key moments or clues that Poirot notices. They are surprising, and "snap" in and out.

Stage and Set Effects

- **Moving train set:** The train exterior and interior compartments move on and off stage throughout the performance
- **<SPOILERS> Pencil into wound:** During the examination of Ratchett's body, Poirot pokes a pencil into the stab wounds to inspect them. (Act One)

Audience Interaction

Murder on the Orient Express has minimal audience interaction. The performers remain on stage throughout the show, and there is no direct interaction with audience members.

Poirot sometimes speaks out to the entire audience like a narrator.

There is no other audience interaction.

Triggers

Includes references to the death of a child and suicide, depictions of death, gunshots and strobe lighting.

There are loud gunshot sounds across the play. Sometimes these gunshots are heard by all the characters, and sometimes they are memories for Poirot.

Additionally, this production deals with several potentially distressing themes and content:

Opening Scenes (First 10 minutes)

- A distressing scene depicting a shadowy figure approaching a child's bed, causing the child to scream
- Loud train whistle and engine sounds

Act One

- Murder investigation with discussion of violence
- Simulated bloody dead body shown on stage (approximately 30 minutes in)
- Prop gun appears with a loud gunshot sound effect near the end of Act One
- References to the kidnapping and murder of a child (Daisy Armstrong)

Act Two

- Emotional distress, grief and anger expressed by multiple characters
- Stylised re-enactment of the murder during the final revelation
- Exploration of revenge, justice and moral ambiguity

Sensory Elements

- Sudden loud sounds throughout (train whistles, gunshots, screams)
- Strobe-like projections at key moments in both acts

Want to know more?

Reach out to Sam Phillips, Auckland Theatre Company's Head of Learning and Participation, on sam@atc.co.nz or on 0212986253. Sam will also be at the ASB Waterfront Theatre and will present the pre-show demonstration.

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