In 1947, at Her Majesty’s request, Agatha Christie wrote a thirty minute radio drama called “Three Blind Mice” as part of the 80th birthday celebration of Queen Mary. It was loosely based on a foster care scandal that dominated the London papers in the final days of World War Two. Five years later she adapted it into what she assumed would be a modest play that, at most, would run about eight months. Little did she know that the piece she had written, now called The Mousetrap, would become the longest running play in the history of the commercial theatre.

In 1994, I was an actor in my sixth year at the Alley. In those days, the theatre operated on a seasonal schedule, with the first shows starting in September and the final production wrapping up in early June. July and August were traditionally dark. During this downtime in the mid-1970’s, the Alley tried to fill its summer schedule by becoming a motion picture repertory house. A big screen was installed on the main stage and each weekend...
brought a showing of classic films. Years before I became an actor, my high school movie nerd friends and I would drive from La Porte into downtown Houston to the Alley, and here we were given our first exposure to Fellini, obscure Hitchcock, and early John Ford. The great silent films were also shown, accompanied by live piano and violin. The double bill included the “Friday Night Sleaze” series, where a discerning late night crowd could take in *Curse of the Corpse Grinders* or *Night of the Living Dead*. But the story goes that the theatre ran afoul of the Projectionist’s Union, and once again summers became dark.

Until 1994. The initial plan was to create programming that kept the actors and the shops employed nearly year-round so people wouldn’t have to spread out across the nation looking for summer work. These would be simple, low budget productions of theatre chestnuts—mysteries and occasional comedies. The theatre would get a corporation to underwrite it and hopefully it wouldn’t lose too much money.

Little did we know it would become not only an audience favorite, but a major source of ticket revenue, second only to *A Christmas Carol*. Last summer’s offering, *The 39 Steps* would have topped the million dollar mark in ticket sales if its run hadn’t been cut short by Hurricane Harvey.

Since appearing in that first Summer Chills in 1994, I’ve acted in 15 Summer Chills productions and directed eight.

Whether it’s playing Hercule Poirot or directing our Resident Company in *The Mousetrap*, I find Agatha Christie to be a writer of substance whose work rewards scrutiny.
Actors new to the genre are always surprised at how satisfying appearing in one of her plays can be. Not only are these complex characters navigating their way through a world of murder, morality, and deceit, but playing to a Christie audience is a unique experience as well. Performing for 700 people, all assuming the role of detective themselves, leaning forward in their seats, looking for clues in every subtle gesture, every vocal inflection and every sideways glance, is an exhilarating challenge for an actor.

You don’t need to be a Poirot to see that the evidence speaks for itself. The Mousetrap opened in November of 1952 and is still running today. Agatha Christie is not only the world's best-selling novelist, but she is one of the most successful playwrights of all time.