

ALLEY THEATRE

New Artistic Director Rob Melrose Helms First Alley Production – Agatha Christie’s MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, Adapted by Ken Ludwig

The ExxonMobil Summer Chills series returns with James Black stepping back into the Hercule Poirot role alongside Alley Resident Acting Company members

Playing in the Hubbard Theatre, July 19 – August 25, 2019

HOUSTON –The Alley Theatre and Rob Melrose, new Artistic Director of the Tony Award®-winning Alley Theatre, announce the cast and crew of the ExxonMobil Summer Chills production, **Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express***, Adapted by Ken Ludwig, offering a cool escape from the sizzling summer heat. *Murder on the Orient Express* will be Rob Melrose’s directorial debut on the Alley stage. The crime thriller runs July 19-August 25, 2019, on the Hubbard Theatre stage. Tickets are available now at alleytheatre.org or by calling the Box Office at 713.220.5700.

Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*, a plot-twist masterpiece, is set aboard the Orient Express as it travels from Istanbul to Western Europe in 1934. Just after midnight, a snowdrift stops the train in its tracks. An American tycoon has been murdered and renowned detective Hercule Poirot must sort through a train full of suspects. Playwright Ken Ludwig (*The Three Musketeers*) adapts the classic thriller that will leave audiences guessing whodunit.

“The Alley has a long history of producing Agatha Christie’s work and the chance to direct Ken’s adaptation of her most famous work and most beloved novel on stage is very exciting,” said Melrose. “This play moves like lightening with mysterious characters and clues dropped throughout, complemented by an amazing set design. I look forward to going on this journey with audiences and diving deep into Agatha Christie’s world.”

The Alley Theatre first produced Agatha Christie’s work in 1958, with *Spider’s Web*. Christie’s most-produced work at the Alley has been *The Mousetrap* (2018, 2010, 2003, 1995, and 1981). This is the Alley’s first time producing *Murder on the Orient Express*. Other Christie plays at the Alley include *The Hollow*, *Death on the Nile*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, *Towards Zero*, and *Black Coffee*.

James Black, who served as the Alley’s Interim Artistic Director for the 2018-19 Season steps back into the Resident Acting Company and returns to the role of Hercule Poirot, a character he played in the Alley’s 2012 production of *Black Coffee*. He is joined by the rest of the Resident Acting Company members **Elizabeth Bunch** as Helen Hubbard, **Dylan Godwin** as Hector MacQueen, **Shawn Hamilton** as Monsieur Bouc, **Chris Hutchison** as Samuel Ratchett, **Melissa Pritchett** as Greta Ohlsson, **David Rainey** as Marcel the Head Waiter, **Jay Sullivan** as Colonel Arbuthnot, and **Todd Waite** as Michel the Coordinator.

In addition to the Resident Acting Company are returning Alley actors **Estée Burks** (*Cleo*, *Amerikin* reading) as Mary Debenham, **Susan Koozin** (*Whistlin’ Dixie* reading, *Sustainable Living* reading) as Princess Dragomiroff, and **Melissa Molano** (*Twelfth Night*, *A Christmas Carol*) as Countess Andrenyi.

The creative team includes Scenic Design by Michael Locher, Costume Design by Raquel Barreto, Lighting Design by Cat Tate Starmer, Sound Design by Cliff Caruthers, Assistant Director Brandon Weinbrenner, and Dialect Coach Ron Carlos.

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Adapted by Ken Ludwig begins previews July 19, opens July 24, and runs through August 25 in the Hubbard Theatre. Performances of *Murder on the Orient Express* are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday at 8:00 p.m., Saturday at 2:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. *Murder on the Orient Express* is recommended for ages 12 and up.

SPONSORS: *Murder on the Orient Express* and the Summer Chills series is presented by ExxonMobil. The Alley Theatre is supported by the 2019-20 Season sponsor United Airlines, the official airline of the Alley Theatre; The Four Seasons Hotel Houston, the official hotel of the Alley Theatre; and Lynn Wyatt.

TICKETS: Tickets to *Murder on the Orient Express* are now on sale and start at \$28. Discounted tickets are available for military, seniors, and any student, regardless of age, with a valid student ID for designated performances. Tickets can be ordered online (alleytheatre.org) or by phone (713.220.5700).

DESIGNER TALK: One hour before the Sunday, July 21 matinee preview performance (2:30 p.m.), a member of the artistic staff will lead a discussion with the production's creative team to give audiences a behind-the-scenes look at the design process. These pre-show talks will offer audiences an exclusive opportunity to ask questions about the designer's work and learn how they brought the script to life. Designer Talks will take place in the Texas Room.

SPECIAL EVENT: VIP EXPERIENCE – ALL ABOARD

All aboard the Orient Express! Purchase a VIP ticket and be whisked away on an extraordinary adventure. Before your performance of *Murder on the Orient Express*, travel "behind the tracks" with your personal passport to enter the world of this murder mystery. You will receive VIP access to a pre-show reception with your fellow train passengers including treats, snacks, a beverage for your journey, a customized passport, and a collectible gift, all followed by a meet and greet with the actors in costume after they appear on stage. The VIP Experience is \$25 per person and may be added when you purchase your show ticket at alleytheatre.org/SummerChillsVIP or via the Box Office at 713-220-5700. You won't want to miss your shot at this experience that is full steam ahead!

PRESS PHOTOS: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3evc1x1feffpdaz/AADYfz_Dvdx60zi61sDlqZ-Wa?dl=0

VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFBQXUJ15UI>

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ABOUT THE ALLEY THEATRE

The Alley Theatre, one of America's leading nonprofit theatres, is a nationally recognized performing arts company led by Artistic Director Rob Melrose and Managing Director Dean R. Gladden. The Alley produces up to 16 plays each year in its newly renovated Theatre, ranging from the best current work, to re-invigorated classic plays, to new plays by contemporary writers. The Alley is home to a resident company of actors. In addition, the Alley engages theatre artists of every discipline – actors, designers, composers, playwrights – who work on individual productions throughout each season as visiting artists.

The renovation of the Alley's Hubbard Theatre created a new 774-seat state-of-the-art performance venue. Matched with the newly rebuilt 296-seat Neuhaus Theatre, the Alley offers nearly 500 performances each season. The Company reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performance and education programs. Its audience enrichment programs include pre-show and post-performance talks, events, and workshops for audience members of all ages.

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