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Regional Reviews: Phoenix

The Play That Goes Wrong

Mesa Community College

Review by [Gil Benbrook](#)

Also see Gil's review of [Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat](#)

For over three decades, Michael Frayn's classic farce *Noises Off* has been the gold standard for plays within a play gone awry. While there have been other comedies that feature backstage antics, Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer, and Henry Shields breathed new life into the genre with their uproarious creation *The Play That Goes Wrong*, which originally took London by storm in 2014, played Broadway, had a national tour, and is still running Off-Broadway while also now being produced at regional theatre companies. While a few moments and some scenes in the comedy may feel repetitive, the talented cast at Mesa Community College cast throws themselves, quite literally, into their roles, creating a memorable and often hilarious comic production.



Alex Parker and Jesse Kinser

Photo by Nick Woodward-Shaw

The premise of the show is simple. We, the audience, are about to witness the latest production presented by The Cornley University Drama Society—a hilariously inept British whodunit titled *The Murder at Haversham Manor*. This third-rate theatre company comprises amateurs, including an actor who can't remember how to pronounce words in the script, a dog in the cast that has gone missing, stagehands who miss their cues, and a set that appears to have been put together with Scotch tape. Chaos ensues even before the play begins, with props misplaced and the set crumbling as the performance unfolds.

The Play That Goes Wrong, which earned the 2015 Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Comedy and a Tony for its set design, amplifies the chaotic backstage mayhem of *Noises Off*. However, it lacks the character development found in Frayn's work, which enhances the humor by giving insight into the offstage lives of the fictional actors. Additionally, the plot of the play within a play becomes somewhat overshadowed by the mounting insanity.

Fortunately, it's a very funny play and Chelsea Anderson's direction and the entire MCC cast are excellent. Anderson maintains a fast pace and frenetic action throughout the production. The hilarity escalates continuously, with each moment meticulously timed to elicit big laughs. While the cast all are very good in delivering their humorous portrayals, there are a few comic bits where timing could be slightly tighter to generate even bigger laughs. However, even with those few tiny quibbles, the overall impact is excellent and the end result very funny.

There's much to love in this production especially when the two stage managers are reluctantly pulled into the performance and the cast find themselves at odds with the props and set. Nicholas Chizek shines as the actor who

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the humorous props, consistently draw laughter. The costumes by Gail Wolfenden-Stieb and hair, wigs, and make-up by Bo Stass are gorgeous, period-perfect designs. Peter Weisman's lighting and Dakota Erickson's sound design



additional pops of humor throughout.

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enzied action and a frantic, fast pace, Mesa Community College's production of *The Play That Goes Wrong* is a sidesplitting comedy that will have you laughing continually throughout its two-hour duration.

The Play That Goes Wrong runs through October 14, 2023, at Mesa Community College, Southern & Dobson Campus, 1833 W. Southern Avenue, Mesa AZ. For tickets and information, please visit <http://www.mesacc.edu>

- Directed by Chelsea Anderson
- Stage Manager: Megan Perales
- Scenic Design: Rachel Aguirre
- Lighting Design: Peter Weisman
- Costume Design: Gail Wolfenden-Stieb
- Hair, Wigs and Make-up Designer: Bo Stass Sound Design: Dakota Erickson
- Props: Natalie Ward
- Dramaturg: Breckyn Hall

Cast:

- Chris: Jeffrey Rudolph
- Robert: Jesse Kinser
- Dennis: Nicholas Chizek
- Max: Alex Parker
- Annie: Mantra Rostami
- Sandra: Jaiden Weid
- Trevor: Jayden Brighton
- Jonathan: Andy Gongora
- Crew: Autumn Calkins, Ki Jackson

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