**AND THEN THERE WERE NONE – REVIEW**

**Cream teas, pleasant beaches, homicidal lunacy: however will it end? Paul Stammers isn't telling!**

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Devon – a mellow land of cream teas, pleasant beaches and… homicidal lunacy on a windswept rock. Ten strangers find themselves cut off from civilisation in Agatha Christie’s tense and much-emulated thriller, where the body count puts Midsomer Murders to shame once the arrivals have settled in and poured themselves a peg of whisky or three.

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For those who haven’t seen the numerous adaptations, this isn’t really a whodunnit – rather, it’s a macabre entertainment, well suited to TV and theatre rather than the written page. An excellent backdrop and adept use of sound, such as a stentorian gramophone recording that denounces each of the group in turn, makes this a strong and confident production from the outset.

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The cast look like they’re enjoying themselves despite the grisly goings on, none more so than Rory Phillips as rakish Philip Lombard, who chortles at the news of another victim falling prey to the killer in their midst. His character’s casual racism – blasé references to deaths of natives in Africa – might get a few people in the audience tutting, but he often steals the show. He flirts amusingly with Elaine Leggett as glamorous former schoolteacher Vera, and who puts in a terrific performance considering she joined the cast only a few weeks ago as a replacement for Amy Stammers.

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The characters may not be the most believable, but they are an assorted lot. Gareth Hammond is authoritative and aloof as judge Sir Lawrence Wargrave; Nick Smith is shady as ex-policeman William Blore (there’s a reason why his South African twang is pretty ropy at the start); Rob Wondrak as Dr Armstrong seems curt and decisive in the first act, but soon turns febrile and panicky. Ianto Wain is gloomy as portly General Mackenzie, cutting rather a sad creature.

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Liz Hutchinson raises a few chuckles as outspoken religious spinster Emily Brent; Ed Miller is glib and enjoyably selfish as the fast-driving Anthony Marston, for whom everything’s 'wizard'. Steve Ashcroft is (yet again) a stoic butler, supported by Lesley Robinson as his non-nonsense wife Ethel. Joe O’Connor takes an unusually minor role in this production directed by Denise Santilli, appearing briefly as the boatman Fred Narracott.

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Although not short, the time flies in this brisk murder spree. So, how does it end? Well, that depends on which of the two finales the Players have chosen to put on. I’m not telling.