

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

Rain or Shine Theatre

The Chipping Hall, Wotton-under-Edge

Saturday 17th December 2016

It's Christmas, that time of the year when theatres throw aside their usual schedules, and stage anything with even the remotest hint of Yuletide to attract the punters. Pantomimes, fairy-tales, the odd ghost story or murder mystery are par for the course, and into this seasonal hall of fame strides Tom Jordan's inspired re-invention of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's celebrated crime thriller *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.



A giant, fearsome beast roaming the wilds of Dartmoor has allegedly killed Sherlock Holmes' friend Sir Charles Baskerville, whose nephew and sole heir Sir Henry may now be in danger. Its huge and unearthly footprints, an anonymous note, a woman crying in the night and an escaped murderer on the loose - you can't help wondering who or what is out there, and who's next on the kill list. Grim stuff indeed; time to hide behind the sofa.

Fat chance. Enter Rain or Shine, and one of the classics of Victorian literature **explodes into a wonderfully entertaining, almost Morecambe & Wise-ish comedy that's in the same league as that West End production of *The 39 Steps*** i.e. put it on stage and a dark detective novel suddenly becomes **a delicious mirthfest**. It's also **another masterclass in crystal-clear diction and multiple-role playing**. "*Four actors. One mystery. No clue.*" is what it says on the flyer. Don't worry, the hoity-toity Holmes quickly solves the mystery (there's a surprise), but for my money, there is a fifth trouper in this show, unseen but clearly audible. I refer to the judiciously-chosen sound effects, especially the dramatic chords at the merest mention of the word "*Supernatural*" (Cue the fixed stares).

All present and equally correct are high melodrama, lugubrious butlers, more clichés and accents than you can shake a stringless violin at, and when the elusive hound finally puts in appearance, **all hilarity is let loose**. On their trademark postage stamp-sized set, improvisation again knows no bounds. It's remarkable what you can do with a picture frame, a few painted book shelves and a couple of hats; a cosy firelit lounge transforms into a Devon-bound express train, as well as the freezing, fogbound moors, and who needs a coat hanger when an eccentric valet can stand in?

Rain or Shine's first-ever stopover in Wotton-Under-Edge was a total success, and should their summer 2017 production of *Twelfth Night* take them back to South Gloucestershire, for **today's appreciative audience that howled with laughter far louder than the eponymous canine**, it won't be a day too soon.