

The Mousetrap

It's one of Agatha Christie's most legendary pieces of work and one of its most appealing qualities is that the audience are asked not to divulge its conclusion after leaving the theatre.

The scene is set when a group of people gathered in a country house cut off by the snow discover, to their horror, that there is a murderer in their midst. Who can it be? One by one the suspicious characters reveal their sordid pasts until at the last, nerve-shredding moment the identity and the motive are finally revealed.

The Mousetrap is the longest-running play in the history of London's West End.

Running continuously for over 60 years, *The Mousetrap* has broken records in London's West End and established Agatha Christie as a playwright in the public eye. Since its debut in 1952 it has become the longest running play in the history of London's West End with the 25,000th performance taking place on 18 November 2012. The 25,000th performance was marked with a one-off star studded performance, introduced by Christie's grandson Mathew Prichard and featuring Patrick Stewart, Julie Walters and Miranda Hart. The performance accompanied the unveiling of the Agatha Christie memorial statue in Leicester Square which commemorated her great works and her contributions to the theatre.

The story was adapted from a radio play, *Three Blind Mice*, written for the Royal family in 1947. The stage play had to be renamed on the insistence of another producer, Emile Littler, who had used the name on stage before the Second World War, and it was Agatha Christie's son-in-law, Anthony Hicks who suggested the new title. In fact, it refers to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet cryptically calls the play depicting the murder of the king, 'The Mousetrap'.

The original West End cast included Richard Attenborough and his wife Sheila Sim. One actor has been included in every performance since the opening night and that is Deryck Guyler, whose voice recording reads the radio news bulletin in every show at St Martin's Theatre.

Agatha Christie gave the rights to *The Mousetrap* to her grandson Mathew Prichard for his 9th birthday, "Mathew, of course, was always the most lucky member of the family, and it *would* be Mathew's gift that turned out the big money winner." (At the time he wanted a bike.)

In 1954 the play was one of three Christie's running simultaneously in London's West End, a feat which made Agatha Christie the first female playwright to achieve.

In 1997 The Mousetrap Theatre Projects initiative was launched, a charity which helps young people experience London's theatre, and to which the money from the 25,000th performance was donated.

The contract terms of the play state that no film version can be made until the West End show has been closed for at least six months (perhaps no one anticipated the show's success), however an unapproved Russian film version was made in 1990 titled *Myshelovka*.

