

The Trick Is Knowing How to Get Away with It

By Marinell Haegelin



From left Faith Knight/Evelyn Roth, Charlie Buckland/Henry Roth, and Stephen MacNeice/Detective Chief Inspector Lazan standing

Recently returned from London, Evelyn and husband are updating one another when she learns Henry has invited someone for that evening. Unnerved, Evelyn takes a stab at quashing the plan. The very reason the Roths chose to live in the Scottish Highland's remoteness was to put distance between London's hustle and bustle. For the successful thriller writer, the moors offer atmosphere and peace conducive to writing. Whereas for the recovering alcoholic there are fewer temptations, plus, her rehab sessions are a train ride away. Henry soothingly explains why the evening's important to him; also, the young actor's importance for his recently finished "seismic" play. Obviously, Henry calls the shots in this relationship. Indeed, upon arrival Jack is politely unobtrusive, even complimenting Evelyn on the hunting lodge's renovations; with Henry, Jack's laser focus is on getting the part. As the evening wears on, innocence is replaced by intrigues leading to a traumatic result. Time lags. Highland winds howl. Yuletide tunes play. Subtle domestic shifts. An untimely visitor: the Ghoul? Or? Will the horror never quit!

The English Theatre truly is Hamburg's "bridge to London," presenting the European premiere of

Death Kneel

A thriller by James Cawood

at the English Theatre of Hamburg
with Paul Glaser directing



Joseph Passafaro/Jack Willoughby

James Cawood's latest thriller that blends classic genre attributes with black humor and British wit. Well versed in theater, the playwright trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, and while acting onstage wrote his first thriller offstage, *Stone Cold Murder*. It premiered before Hamburg audiences September 5, 2013. *Echoes of the Grain*, Cawood's second play was short-listed for the International Playwriting Festival Award. Cawood is a fan of, and inspired by Alfred Hitchcock, "the Master of Suspense;" in *Death Knell*, a reference to the man himself is inserted in the dialogue.

Director Paul Glaser concentrated on casting and blocking the production. He considered it essential for the subtlety of intrigues and plot twists to have maximum effect, because of the play's complicated layers of interaction. Like a master puppeteer plucking and pulling strings, he reveals the characters subterfuges and motives. Glaser wanted audiences to share in the characters' turbulent interactions from suspenseful start to macabre finish. By underscoring certain scenes, the director/composer's music heightens the emotional impact. The four talented London thespians unanimously



Stephen MacNeice/Detective Chief Inspector Lazan

agree with the director; they said finding balance in their characters' layered psyches was challenging.

The Roth's relationship is at the core of the plot: motivation, naiveté, deceit, ulterior motives, shame, credulity, jealousies, and ingenuousness. As Henry Roth, Charlie Buckland said he is the constant character. Charlie compared the many layer's intricacies to a club sandwich—how maintaining the balance and perspective is key to how the play unfolds in relationship to the bigger picture, and the characters reciprocal actions. From her first read-through, Faith Knight wanted to play Evelyn Roth. It's a meaty role and a strong female character whose actions ricochet against

preconceptions and assumptions. Faith said the role's relentless emotionality takes lots of energy and concentration—and she loves every minute. Joseph Passafaro/Jack Willoughby likens his role to a character within a character's character. Again, paramount was maintaining equilibrium with his character in relationship to the whole. That required attention to detail, especially pulling off a personality switcheroo between acts one and two. For Stephen MacNeice, balancing what Detective Chief Inspector Lazan says, what's not said, and what Stephen knows will happen was as essential. Just as Stephen's understated emphasis to innuendos in his lines is used for utmost effect. Having a classical repertoire, Stephen embraced doing an unorthodox character in a thriller genre. The actors arrived Sunday August 12, and started working on the play the next day. So now, they are itching to explore this Hanseatic city/state's enchanting nooks and crannies.

Every sensation from pleasure to trepidation is enormously intensified in this atypical thriller. The physical elements—stage set, lighting/sound design—increase the gripping, chilling, and humorous onstage action. Amid what we think we're seeing, what emerges in the next scene, and the unexpected "seismic" ending, the cleverly crafted *Death Knell* entangles lust, escapism, violence, betrayals and death. Forget second-guessing anything; instead, immerse yourself in this energetically absorbing, entertaining production.



From left Charlie Buckland/Henry Roth and Faith Knight/Evelyn Roth

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Kicking-off the 2018–2019 Season, *DEATH KNELL* is a thriller by James Cawood. It premiered September 6, 2018 and runs through November 3, 2018.

HERE LIES JEREMY TROY, a farce by Jack Sharkey, will premiere November 15, 2018 and runs through February 2, 2019.

Evening and matinee performances; tickets available at the theatre or online: www.englishtheatre.de. The English Theatre of Hamburg, Lerchenfeld 14, 22081 Hamburg, Tel: 040-227 70 89; U-Bahn Mundsburg.