

# WCP Explores the Dangers of Arrogance In Gripping Production of *Rope*

By DEVON GOHDE for *The Westfield Leader* on March 20, 2025

WESTFIELD – Patrick Hamilton’s *Rope* is a timeless psychological thriller that explores the dangers of arrogance and the consequences of moral detachment. Westfield Community Players’ production of Mr. Hamilton’s play captures the suspense and gripping tension of murder in real-time.

Wyndham Brandon (Rudy Palma) and Charles Granillo (Ross Pholing), two friends who believe they are intellectually superior to their colleagues, murder a fellow student, Ronald Kentley (Richard Bull), and hide his body in a trunk. They then invite guests over for a party, where they serve food on top of the trunk. The motive for the murder? Solely to see if they can get away with it due to their intelligence. However, as the party continues, the two men’s former tutor, Ruppert Cadell (Rick Brown), becomes suspicious of Wyndham and Charles’ behavior.

While “who dunnit” plays are typically associated with plays about murder, making the audience aware of who is responsible for the crime in the play's opening doesn’t take away from the building tension. As the trunk is set in the middle of the stage, it’s a constant reminder to the audience that a body is in there, right under the guests’ noses. The trunk becomes its own character. It serves as a macabre, almost omnipresent reminder of the crime. The fact that the trunk is in plain view but entirely overlooked by the guests amplifies the tension. Creating an unsettling juxtaposition between the normalcy of their social gathering and the violent secret hidden so close by.

Mr. Palma, as Wyndham, the charismatic yet chilling mastermind of the murder, delivers a charming and unnerving performance, drawing the audience in while simultaneously unsettling them. Even as things slowly spiral, Wyndham keeps the mindset that he is too intelligent to get caught. In contrast to Mr. Pholing, as Charles, who portrays a more anxious, fragile character whose guilt unravels throughout the night. Their dynamic is electric as their tension builds. Wyndham’s calm control versus Charles’ escalating panic creates a sense of unease in every interaction. The push and pull between the two is at the heart of the play’s suspense, with Mr. Palma’s Wyndham pushing forward with calculated precision while Mr. Pholing’s Charles crumbles under the pressure of his conscience.

The way their performances play off each other, with Wyndham’s cold detachment clashing against Charles’ mounting desperation, makes for some of the most compelling moments in the production. It’s a beautifully layered dynamic showing how much can be conveyed through nuance and tension, with both actors delivering powerhouse performances.

Another standout performance is Rick Brown as Ruppert Cadell, who quickly picks up on their strange behavior. Mr. Brown’s performance is about restraint, and he uses this skill effectively. His Ruppert doesn’t immediately reveal his suspicions; he watches, listens, and assesses. Mr. Brown’s nuanced portrayal allows Ruppert to come across as both intellectually astute and deeply curious about the changes he sees in Wyndham and Charles. There’s an almost clinical detachment in his observations, but it’s clear that he’s slowly piecing together the puzzle of what’s happening in the room.

His quiet, unassuming demeanor contrasts with the mounting tension in the room, but his growing realization of the crime brings a quiet intensity to the stage. His ability to perceive the men’s shifting moods without fully confronting them too early creates an undercurrent of suspense that builds steadily. It’s as though Mr. Brown is slowly peeling back the layers of his character’s realization, and the audience feels the tension rise with each passing moment.

WCP’s production of *Rope*, directed by Peter Curley and produced by Linda Viel and Lois Stevens, creates an atmosphere of psychological tension, intimacy, and horror. By focusing on the disturbing nuances of character and the dynamic between the murderers and their unsuspecting guests, the production offers a powerful reminder that genuine suspense lies not in the overt but in the subtle, slow unraveling of a dark secret.

This production proves that the play's moral ambiguity themes, the human psyche's fragility, and the horrors lurking beneath the surface still have the power to captivate and disturb today, even after nearly a hundred years since it was written. This performance will leave you breathless until the very last moment.

Rope will have its final performances this weekend on March 21 and 22, with a benefit performance on March 23. For tickets visit [www.wcptheatre.org](http://www.wcptheatre.org) or call (908) 232-1221.