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A small community theater
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April 23 - May 8, 2004

Tartuffe

Reviewed April 13

Running time 2 hours 15 minutes

Molière's seventeenth century comic lampoon of hypocrisy in society and the church is probably his best known and most often produced play. Frequently, it is approached solely as a lampoon of religious hypocrisy. In this production, director Bob Bartlett gives Molière's barbs directed at the gullibility of most people as much emphasis as his lampoons of religious pretentiousness. Production values are acceptable but the cast is uneven resulting in a frustrating evening of direct hits and near misses. The highlight of the evening is the performance of Bruce Alan Rauscher who throws every theatrical trick in the book at the character of the charlatan and appears to have a marvelous time while he is doing it.



Storyline: In the household of a wealthy member of Paris' society a charlatan has earned the confidence of the head of the household, but the rest of the family see through his posturing. Still, he is able to control events to the extent that he takes title to the house and all its contents before his overreaching causes his downfall.

Rauscher, who has held forth on this company's stage as the ill fated John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*, at the former Upstart Crow (now Virginia Shakespeare Company) in *The Nerd*, and in high comedy (*Laughter at Ten O'Clock: Memories of the Carol Burnett Show*) and high drama (*The Andersonville Trial* for which he was nominated for the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in 2002) at the American Century Theater, again demonstrates an ability to throw himself into any well written role. From his entrance weighed down by a cross through to the very end, he has a flippant energy that drives the show.

The rest of the cast is of mixed capability, however, and some of the strengths of individual performances seem squandered. Eileen Farrell, for example, is imperiously haughty as the mother of the head of the household but her delivery is directed outward toward the audience rather than to the other members of the household. Stacey Lane Smith as the daughter of the bamboozled father whines her way through scenes, distracting attention from the work of others. Al Fetske never seems to find the key to turning the head of the household into an understandable character.

The action takes place on a wide and open set designed by director Bartlett and Bruce Ward. Sound designer Brian Donohue pulls musical quotes from Hollywood's version of Biblical epics to underscore the religious pretension side of the play while costume designer Susan Kovalik Tully hits a number of nails right on the head with her high-society garb for members of the family.

Written by Molière. Directed by Bob Bartlett. Design: Bob Bartlett and Bruce Ward (set) Susan Kovalik Tully (costumes) Art Snow (properties) Scooter Choi (makeup) Les Zidel (lights) Brian Donohue (sound) Doug Olmstead (photography) Donna Reynolds (stage manager). Cast: Elsbeth Bupp, Eileen A. Farrell, Al Fetske, James Howard, Cassie Lee, Joseph McMahon, Jason Myles, Bruce Alan Rauscher, Laura Russell, Stacey Lane Smith, Manolo Santalla, Cal Whitehurst.