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**Boisterous 'Tartuffe' celebrates S2's second year**

The News Leader - Staunton, Va.  
 Subjects: Costume design; Theater  
 Author: Culbertson, Charles  
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**Document Text**

Hearty laughter, spontaneous applause and a standing ovation.

If there are better ways to celebrate a performance and - in this case - an anniversary, I'm not sure what they are. Shenandoah Shakespeare's rousing rendition of "Tartuffe" not only commemorates the group's second year in its Blackfriars Playhouse but also serves as a sort of salutary shot across Staunton's bow that high-caliber, professional theater is here to stay.

If you're not familiar with Moliere (1622-1673), Shenandoah Shakespeare's production of "Tartuffe" may be the best way to make his acquaintance.

Jim Warren directed this 1669 comedy about religious hypocrisy with the skill of a tightrope walker. Too little here, and the play would have been prosaic. Too much there, and it would have been a burlesque. As it is, Warren got it just right, and the result is one of the funniest productions yet to come out of this South Market Street performance center.

In a nutshell, Tartuffe - a penniless but outwardly pious beggar - insinuates himself into the household of a well-to-do Parisian named Orgon. Blinded by Tartuffe's self-professed religiosity, Orgon very nearly lets him seduce his wife, disinherit his children, steal his home and throw him in prison. The scenes in which Tartuffe is finally unmasked as a lecher and charlatan will, I promise you, bring down the house.

John Harrell interprets this exquisite villain as a composed, dominating and dangerous man. While he's oilier than a teenager's skin, Harrell's Tartuffe is rarely shifty-eyed and never scurrilous. He's strong and confident of his duplicitous powers, and exerts his evil with a flinty and purposeful malice. And it's the mark of an inspired actor who can take these really awful characteristics and make them funny. Harrell does.

I'm convinced that the role of Orgon was the inspiration for P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster some 250 years later. Daffy, goggle-eyed, incredulous, silly and preposterous, this blistering idiot is wonderfully portrayed by John Paul Scheidler (who, in his wig, bears an uncanny resemblance to Moliere). Scheidler maximizes the comic payoff of this character, and he's one of the reasons the play works so well.

And then there's Dorine. Miriam Donald's portrayal of Orgon's outspoken daughter (who, by the way, seems to have inherited all the smarts in the family) is boisterous without being silly and sexy without being vulgar. Well, okay, maybe a little vulgar. I'll never be able to look at a grape in quite the same way again.

Paul Fidalgo as Orgon's son, Damis, has to be seen to be believed. Resplendent in powder-blue satin and ruffles and fru-fru lacy stuff, he bursts onto the stage throughout the play to spout and puff and threaten physical damage, but always allows others to intervene in the nick of time.

While I'm on the topic, I have to mention that the costumes in "Tartuffe" sparkle just as brilliantly as the actors. Kudos go to Terry Southerington for her eye-popping costume design which, she assures me, is accurate to the period.

Also starring in this intelligent and intelligible production of "Tartuffe" are Kate Eastwood Norris, Becky Peters, Doreen Bechtol, Craig Wallace, Mark Allan Jeter, Daniel M. Burrows, Mike Farmer and James Konicek. The show is stage managed by Jay McClure.

Contact Charles Culbertson via e-mail at [ccleader@hotmail.com](mailto:ccleader@hotmail.com)

IF YOU GO!

\* What:

"Tartuffe"

\* Where:

Blackfriars

Playhouse,

Staunton

\* When:

Intermittently through Nov. 26 and from Jan. 7 -March 27.

\* Tickets and information:

851-1733 or

35 S. New St. (ground floor of parking garage)

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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