

## Entertainment

## Lusty and satirical, 'Bourgeois Gentleman' provides a chance to laugh

By BARBARA RICH  
Daily Progress correspondent

## Theater review

- Where: Culbreth Theatre
- When: Tuesday-Saturday, 8 p.m.
- How much: \$7, \$6, \$5
- Phone: 924-3376

Oh, that Moliere — what a sly one he was! It's easy to picture him deciding, every morning, just which pretension he would puncture that day. And since the 17th-century Frenchman was both an actor and a dramatist, he was sensitive to the front row center seat we reserve for our egos.

In "The Bourgeois Gentleman," which opened a run at the Culbreth Theatre on Thursday night, Moliere aims one of his irreverent arrows at the desire for rising above — far above — one's humble origins. But he goes even further, giving us Jourdain, a man who has not made peace with his merchant genes. He is a simple man — and that term is used advisedly — who believes that signing up for courses, and paying for the esteem of others, will transform him into a gentleman.

The role of Jourdain is a plum, giving the actor permission to chew

scenery with the best of them. Unfortunately, Andrew S. Chernack and Jourdain never reach the kind of inner accord actor and part require; his is a performance as broad as a Midwestern plain, and as unchanging. Chernack chews, but his tongue never goes anywhere near his cheek, and this is the essence of Moliere.

What this one-note interpretation does, however, is to highlight the rest of the cast, and most of them shine away in good form. As "experts" in the fields of music and dance, called in to stimulate Jourdain's wallet as well as his culture

cells, Brad Rickel and Jack Donahue are a hoot. With their pastel clothing, and beauty marks cheekily in place, these inspired fops light up the stage.

But others are there to illuminate it as well. Mark Boynton attempts to teach Jourdain to fence, and Sean Thomas tries to instill some knowledge of philosophy. Of course, they fail, but their performances do not. And neither do two delicious vignettes.

One involves a foursome: Jourdain's daughter, her suitor, the suitor's servant, and the daughter's maid. In a wonderful act-out of lovers' misunderstandings/reconciliations, Erin Mulhollan, Christopher Doyle, Daniel Rosenberg and Elizabeth Anne Kitsos perform in a near-choreographed interlude.

Another gem is a Tom Jonesian meal, with lust the steamy main course. As a count and countess

who never met a mirror they didn't like, and whose physical appetites are those of earthy peasants, Bryan Garey and Tracey Howell are hilarious.

Grace Leigh Bohannon is Jourdain's long-suffering wife, and there are two adorable children who romp about as cupids, complete with bows and arrows. Chloe Tucker and Ben Warner enjoy themselves immensely, and so do we, just looking at them.

The set for this farce — the home of the Jourdain's — is expansive, with a two-tiered chandelier hoisted three sheets to the wind, setting the mood. David Smart has done an excellent job of it, and Joe Saint's lighting and Sean Cullen's sound are fine. But the costumes are stars in their own right, and Louis Bird has gone all out to clothe his all-too mortal characters in some heavenly finery.

The direction by Colleen Kelly is

uneven; at times, a scene will drag on interminably.

There were some opening night glitches: a coat proved resistant to removal, a mirror departed the wall with no help whatsoever, and one dancer's legs failed her, but these are not unusual in such an elaborate production.

Jean Baptiste Lully composed the musical interludes, and the

seven "Interlude Performers" dance, prance, do acrobatic feats and create corny poses. All add to the pleasure of the spectacle.

Laughter is always therapeutic. Today, when much of the world seems to be holding its collective breath, it is particularly beneficial, and "The Bourgeois Gentleman" provides opportunities for releasing one's breath in joyous chuckles.