

## Lovers And Executioners

**Total Rating:** \*\*1/2**Opened:** February 24, 2002**Ended:** March 17, 2002**Country:** USA**State:** Wisconsin**City:** Milwaukee**Company/Producers:**

Milwaukee Repertory Theater

**Theater Type:** Regional**Theater:** Milwaukee Repertory Theater - Stiemke Theater**Theater Address:** 108 East Wells Street**Phone:** (414) 224-9490**Running Time:** 2 hrs**Genre:** Comedy**Author:**

John Strand

**Director:** Edward Morgan**Review:**

Chalk up the current production of *Lovers and Executioners* as one of life's guilty pleasures. Set in the mid-1660s, this wacky period piece employs modern dialogue (and, sadly, modern profanity) to tell its goofy tale of a French feminist three centuries ahead of her time. The woman in question, Julie, is wrongfully left on an island to die by her jealous husband. She survives and is rescued by a passing ship. Vowing to get revenge, she returns to her homeland in disguise and wreaks all sorts of havoc on her husband's life before revealing her true identity. Not terribly complicated, is it?

When creating *Lovers and Executioners*, playwright John Strand loosely adapted the work of an obscure 18th-century French playwright, named Montfleury. Originally, the play was called "La Femme Juge et Partie." Today, one can only imagine Montfleury rolling in his grave. Or perhaps not, as his work continues to live on, albeit in vastly-modified form. The rhyming couplets, exotic setting and convoluted relationships of *Lovers* all suggest a Shakespearean flavor. However, one must categorize this play as "Shakespeare for Dummies."

True, like Shakespeare's plays, this one is written for the "common man." However, it also sinks to the lowest common denominator, especially in the moments when Milwaukee funnyman John McGivern is onstage. As Guzman, a servant, McGivern refuses to get into character. His trademark schtick consists of mugging, double entendres, falsetto shrieks and outrageous ad-libs. Although this stuff was completely hilarious when he starred in *Shear Madness* last year, it is distracting in this case. Equally distracting, for completely different reasons, is the performance given by Jacquelyn Ritz. As Beatrice, the scheming maid, Ritz assumes a grating accent slightly less melodious than fingers scraping a chalkboard. She spits out her lines with such force, some of her words are completely lost.

Thankfully, the rest of the cast manage to maintain the production's buoyancy. The veteran talents of Jonathan Smoots as Bernard, the supposedly cuckolded husband; Laura Gordon, as Julie, his wife; Deborah Staples as a featherbrained flirt and Mark Corkins as Don Lope, her hot-blooded Latin lover, are wondrous to behold. In a smaller role, Michael Daly impresses as Laura's rescuer and spurned suitor.

Under the sure direction of Edward Morgan, the aforementioned actors have fun with the material, teasing it into its full potential. Laura Gordon is particularly striking as a woman who, in the guise of a man, relishes the power of her "new" gender. Though she longs to return to the security of her formerly happy, marital state, she is visibly torn by the thought of relinquishing her masculine power. She is excellent when playing both sides of the gender coin.

On a final note, mention must be made of a series of sword-fighting scenes, courtesy of fight director Colleen Kelly. They add a swashbuckling sizzle to the production.

**Parental:** profanity**Cast:**

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Jonathan Smoots (Bernard), John McGivern (Guzman), Laura Gordon (Julie/Frederic), Jacquelyn Ritz (Beatrice), Deborah Staples (Constance), Michael Daly (Octavius), Mark Corkins (Don Lope).

**Technical:**

Set: Michael Frenkel; Costumes: Helen Q. Huang; Lighting: Joseph Appelt; Sound: Barry G. Funderburg.

**Critic:** Anne Siegel

**Date Reviewed:** March 2002

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