

Theatre Reviews

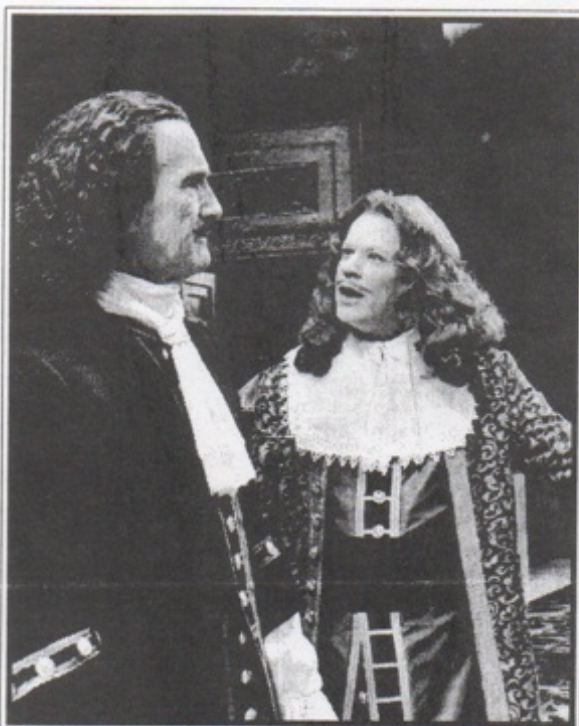


by Dr. Hal Bangelt

Tartuffe, written in 1664, is generally considered Moliere's comic masterpiece. This was the first play to launch the South Coast Repertory Theatre in 1964 at the South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa. Using the same script, the theatre has again mounted this classic comedy which will be playing through February 14. Moliere's Tartuffe is one of those plays that everyone who loves good theatre will want to see. This production at the South Coast Repertory is without a doubt one of the best that has been in our area in years.

The story line, featuring the obsession of the authority figure, is typically Moliere. The father, Orgon, beautifully played by Hal Landon Jr., is obsessed with the appearances and trappings of piety. This allows him to be taken in by the swindler, Tartuffe, who masquerades as a holy man. Orgon's obsession is so great that he would even sacrifice his family for his worship of Tartuffe. Orgon decides that his daughter Mariane (Svetlana Efremova) should marry Tartuffe. Svetlana gives an outstanding performance in playing the daughter who hates Tartuffe and sees him for the villain he really is. Tartuffe reigns supreme even getting Orgon to turn over the deed to his house and fortune. It is not until Orgon's beautiful wife, Elmire, feigns love for Tartuffe as he tried to seduce her that Orgon see what a scoundrel Tartuffe really is. From here the play moves quickly to a wild but happy ending.

The plot is not nearly as important as the lines which the characters speak. Most of the clever lines the author has given to Tartuffe. "Be my pupil and I can assuage your scruples." "It's no sin to sin in confidence." Tartuffe played by Mark Harelik is a sly type of villain. He moves and walks slowly stalking a room like a large cat. Mark's performance and interpretation of the character are original and different. He's very effective and believable. The



main reason that this production is so outstanding is that all of the actors, from Orgon and Tartuffe to the bit parts are so skilled. Svetlana who plays the daughter Mariane, will be remembered for her high pitch squeaks and her dazed walk. Of course, she doesn't do this more than once or twice in moments of great anguish. Orgon's mother, played by Hope Alexander, dominates the first scene with her vitriolic remarks and defense of Tartuffe.

The use of sound effects to heighten the dramatic scenes is masterful. The set and costumes are very appropriate. In many ways, the play is just as relevant today as it was at that time.



One has only to read the newspapers and realize that lies and deceit are still very much with us.

Tartuffe will be playing at the South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa through February 14. Tickets may be purchased by calling (714) 708-5555. H.B.