



CULTURE

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Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

Theater Review (NYC): *Scapin* by Molière

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The Impostures
G: Scapin



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Just off Times Square, a perfect cast is bringing *Scapin*, [Molière's](#) nutty reversal-of-fortune farce, to life with such antic gusto that the four walls of the tiny Turtle's Shell Theater can hardly contain it.

Puppets, singalongs, balloon animals, mugging, pratfalls, paddlings – it could almost be a kids' show, and you certainly could take your kids to this uproarious *Scapin*. It would be a heck of a lot cheaper and less stressful than a trip to FAO Schwarz or to see the Rockettes.

This is the world premiere of Scott McCrea's new English translation of Molière's 17th century comedy. The three-act *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (literally "Scapin's Schemings" or "Scapin's Impostures") is here reshaped into an economical two-act form, with the title shortened as well but the story and the craziness intact.

The players are all very good, but more than that, they are perfectly cast, and superbly directed by Shawn Rozsa. Scapin is played by Spencer Aste, who inhabits the role of the scheming, social-climbing valet to the hilt. The misbehaving scions of two well-heeled families enlist the clever servant to help them out of their respective amorous predicaments. Playing the sons off the fathers, the weaselly Scapin finesses trick after trick, and just when you think his web of deceit is about to crash down on top of him, well – just remember this is a comedy, not a tragedy.

I mentioned that you could bring your kids. The enthusiastic and very talented cast turned the audience of adults at last night's show into a gaggle of giddy oversized boys and girls. (I even caught one of my fellow reviewers laughing, and we're a bunch of seriously gloomy gusses, let me tell you.) Priceless cartoonish touches dot the fast-moving plot, riding the shoulders of the broad physical comedy. A big one is the setting, which has been moved from cosmopolitan Naples to a small Italian town on a festival day. A musician-clown leads us through the proceedings as if we're an audience at a tiny circus. (For a second I pictured Zampano, from Fellini's *La Strada*, turned inside-out into a figure of delightful, rather than dark, amusement.)

A nervous Léandre (the tall, reedy Nico Evers-Swindell) pulls out a piece of knitting to calm his nerves. Later his father Geronte (a tiny, mincing John Freimann) emerges from a sack – fan first. The ladies, including the regal Hyacinte (Maya Rosewood) and the frisky Zerbinette (Catherine Wronowksi), mug shamelessly, as do the pure-

at-heart Octave (Matt Luceno) and his sad-sack pal Silvestre (Jonathan M. Castro). Octave's father Argante (Roger Grunwald) limps stiffly about Keven Lock's funhouse set, perpetually grouchy, pulling on his beard.

Commedia dell'arte, with its related forms, is far from moribund. We see its spirit alive and well in modern analogues, most often on television, in sketch shows like *Kids in the Hall* and British comedies like *Absolutely Fabulous*. But nothing beats the high-spirited hijinks of a play like *Scapin* seen live. This holiday season, revisit – or discover – Molière. Good for what ails ya, I promise.

Tickets are \$18, online at [TheaterMania](#) or call (866) 811-4111. Through Dec. 22 at the [Turtle's Shell Theater](#), Times Square.



[Whisperado](#)

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