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EVENT SPACE AND THEATER

'Scapades by Amy Freeman

Scapin reviewed December 5, 2007

Commedia dell'Arte

troupes began in Italy in 1540. By the 1570's, troupes were all over Europe, including France, where they were able to influence the great playwright Molière. The basic scenario featured old, grumpy fathers preventing their sons and daughters from pursuing their romantic interests. Often, the sons and daughters would seek the help of their servants. In the world of Commedia dell'Arte, Scapin is the rascally servant character. The title character of Molière's comedy, Scapin, is just that. He plots against his masters and envisions himself to be better than he truly is. A new translation of the play by Scott McCrea seeks to remain close to Molière's intent by focusing on the comedy of the play and depicting Scapin as a social climber.



Spencer Aste, John Freimann and Emile Nebbia

Turtle Shell's production creates a bright, animated atmosphere. The play is set in "Itty Bitty Italy," the smallest city in Italy, sometime in the 1970's. The sets, by Keven Lock, create a truly carnivalesque backdrop to the action of the play. Paper lanterns hang along the wall; neon pinks and purples abound. The costumes, by A. Christina Gianini, complement the set: Scapin is dressed in double knit lime green pants, a nod to the traditional scapin costume but with a 70's flair.

A musician (Jay Painter) is present from the minute the house doors open to take the audience into the world of the play. His performance of interacting with the audience and welcoming them to the theater initially felt forced, as though he were still warming up to the role. However, by intermission, he had the audience rolling in laughter as he sang songs to certain audience members and made balloon animals.



Jay Painter and Nico Evers-Swindell

The physicality of the actors was remarkable. The two porters (Emile Nebbia and Jay Painter) were constantly at war with each other, battling with a set of suitcases at one point and stripping down to have a wrestling match at another. The famous scene, in which Scapin tricks his master Geronte into a sack and then pretends to be evil swordsmen who beat and stab him, is sublime. How long will the beating last until Geronte pops out of the sack and discovers Scapin's connivery? Moliere cuts the beating off at the third one, perhaps as a relief to the audience, perhaps not, as opinion of Geronte may be considerably low at this point. He has lied about Scapin to his son, and is so miserly he had difficulty parting with 500 crowns to supposedly free his son from pirates.

The performances of the cast are for the most part strong. Spencer Aste is great as Scapin, introducing himself with a flourish of the arms every time his name is said. He elevates himself to such a degree that it is easy to forget that he is, ultimately, the servant of Leandre and Geronte. Catherine Wronowski pulls of a great performance as Zerbinette, the gypsy girl whom those 500 crowns are really saving. In the second act she tells Geronte, not recognizing him as the father of her love, Leandre, of Scapin's plot to get the 500 crowns. Her animated monologue is accompanied by the heavy guitar strumming of the musician, who despite seeming to know that she is telling all to a man she should not, eggs her on.

Scapin accomplishes its goal of focusing on the comedy: it is hilarious. The brightly colored set, costumes, excellent and subtle lighting by Eric Larson, and physical portrayal of the characters by the actors ensure a funny and fun evening of theater for anyone looking for a classic laugh.



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Booker
Silvestre: Jonathan M. Castro
Leandre: Nico Evers-Swindell
Geronte: John Freimann
Argante: Roger Grunwald
Octave: Matt Luceno
Porter: Emile Nebbia
Porter/Musician: Jay Painter
Hyacinte: Maya Rosewood
Zerbinette: Catherine Wronowski

Crew

Production
Assistant: Chrissy Capobianco
Stage Manager: Neal Kowalsky
Assistant Stage Manager: Monet C. Fleming