

InSider

2010 SEASON PLAY GUIDE

Intiman Theatre | Kate Whoriskey, Artistic Director • Inaugural Season | Brain Colburn, Managing Director



A DOCTOR ⁱⁿ SPITE OF HIMSELF

By Molière
Adapted by Christopher Bayes & Steven Epp
Directed by Christopher Bayes

SEPTEMBER OCTOBER, 2010

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Intiman Theatre produces world classics and contemporary plays and presents the work of innovative directors, writers, designers and performers who are masters of their craft.

InSider

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Steven Epp, Don Darryl Rivera, Allen Gilmore and Daniel Breaker

Playing doctor takes on a whole new meaning in Molière's bawdy comedy, which reaches increasingly over-the-top levels of comic pandemonium after a marital squabble between husband and wife Sganarelle and Martine escalates. The spirited wife decides to get revenge on her scoundrel of husband by convincing the town that he's the best doctor around and can cure any ailment, but he turns the tables on her—and everyone else—with his own definition of "in sickness and in health."

Performed with live carnival-style music, *A Doctor in Spite of Himself* is the Seattle debut of Daniel Breaker, a Tony nominee for *Passing Strange* (and a star of Spike Lee's concert film) and the Donkey in *Shrek the Musical* in New York. Among his regional theatre credits, he has appeared numerous times with the Shakespeare Theatre Company of Washington, D.C., earning Helen Hayes Award nominations for *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*.

Co-adaptor and co-star Steven Epp was an actor, writer, director and Co-Artistic Director at Theatre de la Jeune Lune in Minneapolis, winner of the 2005 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, from 1983-2008. In his 25 years with Jeune Lune, he collaborated in the creation and performance of more than 50 productions.

Co-adaptor and director Christopher Bayes began his theatre career with Theatre de la Jeune Lune, where he worked for five years as an actor, director, composer, designer and artistic associate. In 1989 he joined the acting company of The Guthrie Theater where he appeared in more than 20 productions. He created movement and choreography for the Broadway and national touring productions of *The 39 Steps* and serves as Head of Physical Acting at the Yale School of Drama.

THE COMPANY

CAST

Daniel Breaker (*Sganarelle*)
Austin Durant (*L andre*)
Steven Epp (*Lucas/Thibaut*)
Renata Friedman (*Lucinde*)
Allen Gilmore (*M. Robert/G ronte*)
Ashley Marshall (*Martine/Perrin*)
Don Darryl Rivera (*Val re*)
Chelsey Rives (*Jacqueline*)

Greg C. Powers (*Musician*)
Robertson Witmer (*Musician*)

CREATIVE TEAM

Narelle Sissons (*Scenic Designer*)
Elizabeth Caitlin Ward (*Costume Designer*)
Greg Sullivan (*Lighting Designer*)
Aaron Halva (*Composer & Sound Designer*)
Stina Lotti (*Stage Manager*)



MOLIÈRE

Molière was born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in Paris in 1622. At the age of 23 he joined the *Illustre Théâtre*, a troupe of actors who toured throughout the provinces of France, adopting the name Molière to save his father the embarrassment of having an actor in the family. After a brief time in debtor's prison, he traveled with the company for most of the next 15 years, working as an actor and a writer. Inspired by Italian *commedia troupes*, one of his earliest achievements was to move his own company away from improvisation and toward scripted plays that he wrote specifically for his fellow actors. In 1658, the company returned to Paris, where they received the patronage of King Louis XIV and Molière, then the company's manager, established himself as a leading author of comedies and satires, often directing his own plays and performing the leading roles himself. Frequently censured in his own lifetime, Molière is now recognized as one of France's greatest dramatists for a series of plays written between 1661 and 1673, including *The School for Husbands*, *The School for Wives*, *Tartuffe*, *Don Juan*, *The Misanthrope*, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, *Amphitryon*, *The Miser*, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *Scapin*, *The Learned Ladies* and *The Imaginary Invalid*. On February 17, 1673, Molière suffered a hemorrhage on stage while playing the role of the hypochondriac Argan in *The Imaginary Invalid* and passed away later that night. Because he died without renouncing his profession, as tradition required, the Church refused him a proper Christian burial. After the intervention of King Louis, Molière's body was brought to a small cemetery and buried at night, without ceremony.

Molière at Intiman

1979: *Tartuffe*, directed by Stephen Rosenfield

1981: *School for Wives*, directed by Elizabeth Huddle

1986: *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* and *Rehearsal at Versailles*, directed by Elizabeth Huddle

2002: *Scapin*, directed by Christopher Bayes

2010: *A Doctor in Spite of Himself*, directed by Christopher Bayes

THE ADAPTATION

The Art of Adaptation

Adaptation is an art form—the adaptor must retain the meaning of the original language, but find his or her own vocabulary and rhythms. This adaptation—based on a literal, word-for-word translation of the play, and in keeping with Molière's own irreverent spirit—is filled with allusions to pop culture and politics. Here are brief comparisons of two versions of the text: a traditional translation by John Wood and Intiman's adaptation (as it read at the end of the rehearsal period—which is not necessarily the same text that is now performed on stage).

The opening lines, translated by John Wood:

SGANARELLE: No, I tell you I'll have nothing to do with it and it's for me to day. I'm the master.

And as adapted by Bayes and Epp:

SGANARELLE: I already told you! How many times do I have to tell you? I am the master of this house! Me! Moi! Do you hear what I'm saying to you? I do the talking. I'm the decider. You do what I say and I do what I want. Woman!

And another example, from later in the play—first, John Wood's translation:

SGANARELLE: The devil take me if I know anything about medicine! You are a good chap and I'm willing to confide in you just as you confided in me.

LÉANDRE: What! You are actually not...

SGANARELLE: No. They made me a doctor in the teeth of my objections. I never set up to be as learned as all that. I didn't get beyond the bottom class at school. I don't know how they got the idea into their heads, but when I saw that they absolutely insisted on my being a doctor I decided to be one and let someone else take the consequences. But you wouldn't believe how the mistaken notion has spread and how crazy everybody is on taking me for a clever man. They are coming to see me from all ups and downs. If things keep on as they are I reckon I shall stick to Medicine for good. I find it's the best of all trades because whether you

do any good or not you still get your money. We never get blamed for bad workmanship. We slash away at the stuff we are working on, and whereas a cobbler making shoes can't spoil a piece of leather without having to stand the racket himself, in our job we can make a mess of a man without it costing us anything. If we blunder it isn't our look out: it's always the fault of the fellow who's dead and the best part of it is that there's a sort of decency among the dead, a remarkable discretion: you never find them making any complaint against the doctor who killed them!

LÉANDRE: Yes, the dead are certainly very decent fellows in that respect.

And now the Intiman version:

SGANARELLE: Ah, what the hell — I don't know a damn thing about doctoring. It's all just a whole bunch of blahbaddy-blah as far as I can tell.

LÉANDRE: What?! You're not actually a...

SGANARELLE: Never was, never have been, never wanted to be. I got forced to be a doctor completely against my will — in spite of myself, as it's called. All that medical talk? — Blahbaddy-blah. I got no idea what gave them the idea that I was a doctor, but the more they insisted, the more I agreed, and the more I agreed the more I seemed to be one. You'd never believe how many people think that I'm a smarty pants genius doctor guy. It's actually kinda awesome. Because whether you do a good job or not you still get paid. And if something goes wrong the doctor's never to blame. You just change the rules — sunshine is good for you, oh, no, wait, oops, wrong, it gives you the cancer. If a patient dies it's not our fault we failed to keep him from dying, it's his fault he failed to live. And the best part is that the dead keep their mouths shut about it.

LÉANDRE: It's true. The dead are extremely reliable on that account.

Much of what audiences will enjoy during this production seems improvised, topical and local. All of that is true; in writing and performing this version of Molière's comedy, co-adaptors Christopher Bayes and Steven Epp (and the entire company, who helped further develop the script during rehearsals) always looked for laughs that would be specific to audiences in Washington State, and that would allow moments of spontaneity and immediacy for the performers.

At the same time, the foundation of *A Doctor in Spite of Himself* is rigorously rehearsed, and honed with skill and craft using the classic elements of commedia dell'arte, including the archetypal stock characters, plots and *lazzi*.

As defined by Hannah Rae Montgomery of the Yale Repertory Theatre, "a *lazzo* (singular of *lazzi*) is a moment of comic physical business that interrupts the action. Often *lazzi* occur in between plotted scenes, but commedia actors might perform a *lazzo* at any moment, spontaneously inserting it into a scene if they think the dialogue is dragging or the audience's attention waning . . . or if they themselves get bored! While *lazzi* might happen at unpredictable times, each of these stock gags has been rigorously developed and rehearsed; actors in commedia companies had hundreds of planned *lazzi* at their disposal and taught them to younger actors. Certain *lazzi* became traditional in companies over several generations, as fiercely protected as modern trademarks. Many *lazzi* incorporate acrobatics; center on food, sex, and bodily functions; or involve practical jokes."

In an interview with Montgomery for Yale Rep's recent production of Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* which Bayes directed with a cast including Steven Epp and Allen Gilmore, two of the stars of this production—he shared these thoughts about directing this style of comedy. Here are some excerpts.

Christopher Bayes: "I find that you must ask: What is the game of the moment? When you have a company in search of the game together there is a curiosity and appetite for fun that will be exciting to watch. You must all play, attack, devour or provoke until you find what is most silly, beautiful and hilarious. **You also find out many things in front of the audience** and begin to adjust and tweak from performance to performance. The pleasure of the comic world is that it's an ongoing conversation, an enjoyment of the comic problem. We aren't in search of a solution, but a playful adventure full of mystery and disaster. If we're lucky, at the end of the performance...triumph! And sometimes the audience doesn't think that something is as funny as we do, and that can be really funny as well!

"We will rehearse [the *lazzi*] but also try to leave room for spontaneous discovery. I call these *lazzi* "moments of Jazz." We know the melody and the structure, but **each performer has the freedom to take a little solo.** There must be the possibility of disaster. Without that danger, there is no real adventure.

"*Commedia* is a living form. It is not a recreation or historical re-enactment. It comes alive with the new breath of each audience. We see stock characters that we recognize and relate to in every performance. We see reflections of *commedia* in sitcoms, *SNL* and *The Simpsons*. We laugh at idiotic logic and desperate attempts to cover our mistakes no matter what century they come from. **The main trigger for laughter is surprise.** Sometimes we are surprised by a trick. Sometimes we are surprised by the sheer audacity of a performance. Sometimes we are surprised that a bad idea leads to something remarkable. Or that something stupid can turn into something brilliant, simple, and human. I have a feeling that what surprises us also surprised people in the eighteenth century. We haven't changed that much. Although I do think that we bathe more often. And we have the iPhone...what a surprise."