

Old play, timeless storyline

■ With a touch of playfulness, this play brings actors and audience together with participation

By Yael Menahem
Oregon Daily Emerald

Expect the unexpected in the Arena Theater's production of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Moliere's play "The School for Wives."

The title is misleading in this contemporary interpretation of the play, which doesn't set out to teach how to create the perfect wife.

"The School for Wives" is about Arnolphe, a 42-year-old man played by Ross Maxwell, who bought Agnes from her mother when she was four years old and has raised her for the last 13 years to be the perfect wife. Agnes lives in a convent, and he keeps her sheltered from the world so that she will know no other man and to ensure her faithfulness once they marry.

Elizabeth Flesh, who plays Agnes, describes her character as a "really naive girl who hasn't seen any of the world. She's been under strict guidelines not to learn how to read or write," although she does learn how on her own.

Things don't work out for Arnolphe, who comes back from a trip ready to marry the young girl only to find that his bride-to-be has met a young man, and the two have fallen in love.

Fate plays a major role throughout the play, and this is the first trick that fate plays on Arnolphe to mess up his plans.

"He's constantly surprised, and something new always comes up," the play's director Biliiana Stoytcheva-Horissian says.

Stoytcheva-Horissian considers Moliere her favorite playwright, and she's writing her dissertation about him. She also played the role of Agnes in the theater academy in Bulgaria, her native country, in the school's production of the play. In Bulgaria, the production of "The School for Wives" stayed true to Moliere's play, which was set in 17th century France.

"What I really like about the play, on the one hand, is it has the themes that we deal with everyday: It deals with love, marriage, control and fate," Stoytcheva-Horissian says. "But on the other hand, it gives a lot of possibility with theatricality of bringing *comedia del arte*."

Comedia del arte is an Italian concept for improvisational theater where a scenario is given to the actors, who must come up with the scene. Although the dialogue is written, there is still room for interaction with the crowd.

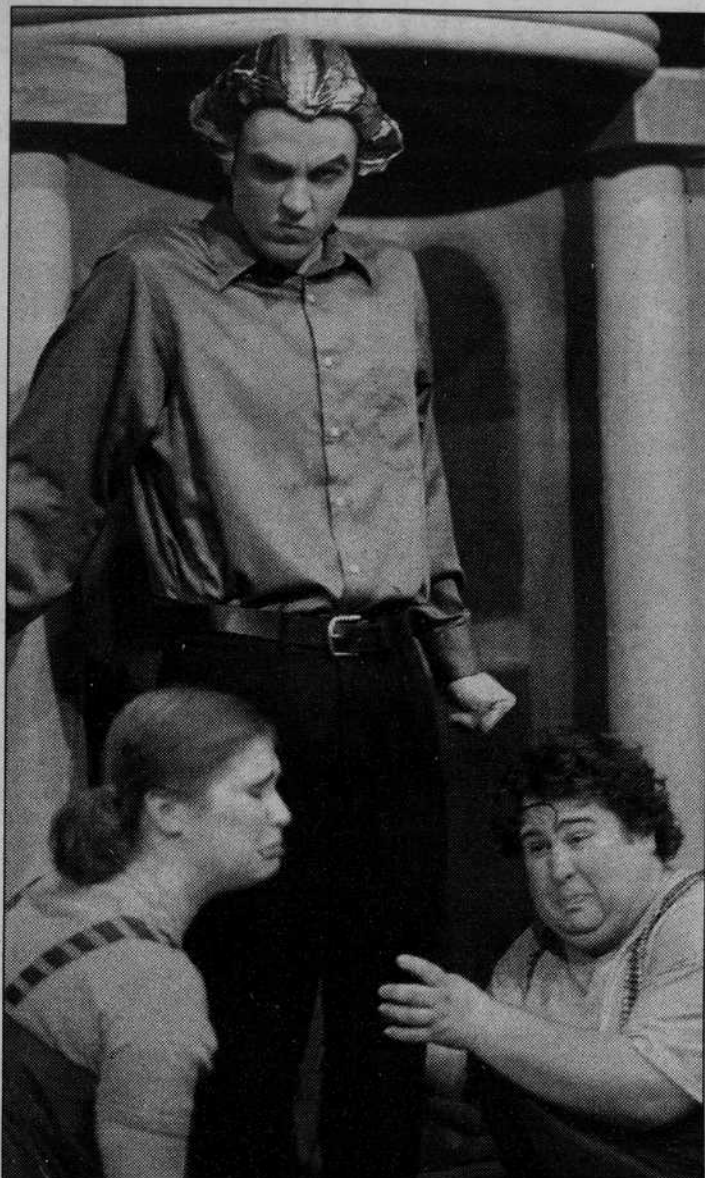
The stage at the Arena Theater is small, which breaks down the wall between actor and audience, making the audience part of the action, Stoytcheva-Horissian says.

"Very often the actors refer to the audience," she says.

This production of "The School for Wives" isn't set in 17th century France. Instead, it spans the century with costumes that aren't period specific.

"It's sort of taking different pieces from throughout history that are kind of ridiculous or over the top and exaggerating them even more [by] adding bright colors, lots of feathers and bows," says Kendall Dodd, the play's costume designer.

Dodd wants to emphasize through her designs that the actors are street theater performers



Azle Malinao-Alvarez Emerald

Ross Maxwell (top photo, center) is Arnolphe, upset because the servants Georgette, Kathryn Reese (top left), and Alain, Michael Govier, have let a stranger in the house, spoiling his plans to marry Agnes. The Moliere play "The School for Wives" opened at Arena Theater Wednesday night and runs through March 11.



who might have put together a costume from a trunk that they've used in other plays.

Even though the story of the play might seem a bit archaic and unappealing to a Eugene audience, Stoytcheva-Horissian assures skeptics that this production's approach is playful.

"We're not trying to make a dark play about a person controlling somebody else's life but rather make it 'Let's have fun' with somebody who's not a totally contemporary thinker [and] who believes that he can control somebody else's life," she says.

By the end of the play, Agnes redeems herself after confronting Arnolphe and eventually leads the life that she chooses for herself. That will probably win the audience over, Flesh says.

This production is also a bit unusual in its blend of cultures.

"We're doing a French play for an American audience done by a Bulgarian director with a [South] Korean scene designer and in Italian style," Stoytcheva-Horissian says.

"The School for Wives" opened Wednesday night at the Arena Theater and continues today through Saturday, with additional shows March 9-11.

Tickets are \$6 for the general public, \$5 for senior citizens, faculty, staff and non-University students, and \$4 for University students.

Tickets are available at the Hult Center, EMU Ticket Office and at the theater box office in the Robinson Theater lobby. All performances begin at 8 p.m.

University Theatre Presents
Moliere's
The School For Wives
Translated By Richard Wilbur
March 1-4, 9-11
The Arena Theatre
8pm
EMU Ticket Office 346-4363
UT Box Office 346-4191
Hult Center 682-5000

Come eat with the Blue Hen today.

She'll give you a warm fuzzy feeling and some good eats.



Open for
Breakfast 7a.m.

A lotta food for
a little money.

1769 Franklin Blvd. • 683-0780 • Eugene & Florence
BREAKFAST • LUNCH • DINNER

hot for chocolate

all events are FREE

thur • mar. 2nd
8-10pm

nicholas & dhymes
acoustic folk band

fri • mar. 3rd
9pm-midnight

eclectic open mic
music • performance art • theatre

Sign-up to perform at The Break (located next to The Buzz)
For more info call Melanie at 346-3725

sat • mar. 4th
9:30-11:30pm

hot for chocolate
pop rock

fri • mar. 10th
9pm-midnight

eclectic open mic
music • performance art • theatre

Sign-up to perform at The Break (located next to The Buzz)
For more info call Melanie at 346-3725



The Buzz • EMU ground floor

FUN

stuff in the
ODE Classifieds
(Off The Mark,
your daily horoscope
and of course
the crossword.)