

## [ARTS REVIEW: 'TARTUFFE' AND 'THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR'](#)

### Shakespeare and Moliere Reinterpreted Underneath the Sun and Stars in Topanga's Woods

by Parimal Rohit



Whether taking in a matinee showing of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* or an evening play of *Tartuffe*, audiences will definitely be entertained and amused by these two comedic takes of life in England and France. Be it a romantic date in a secluded getaway on a Friday night or the yearning to be taken away from the world on a lazy Sunday afternoon, both productions at the Theatricum Botanicum are a great way to take in some fun theatre and cultured entertainment.

#### ***Tartuffe***

Officially taking the stage on June 11th and playing through October 1st, *Tartuffe* reprises one of Moliere's greatest masterpieces about hypocrisy, blind faith, and human greed. Amongst the most well known tales ever told, Moliere's *Tartuffe* is quite a social commentary on religion and manipulation, with a conniving con artist donning the cloth of God in order to defraud a man of his riches, his home, and his wife.

Moliere's *Tartuffe* comes to the Theatricum Botanicum as part of the theatre's "Outdoors & Inspired" Summer Repertory Season; it stars Aaron Hendry in the title role, and Ted Barton as the conned Orgon.

In watching the modern stage production of a 17th century classic tale that has endured the test of time, audiences can expect more of the same in terms of plot and character development. All the common characterizations of greed, lust, faith, manipulation, and trust are on full display throughout the production.

Where Geer's *Tartuffe* separates itself from Moliere's original is a unique spin altering the way the story plays out. (Of course, telling you what that twist is would be quite a spoiler, so you will have to attend the play to see what happens.)

A disclaimer of spoiler alerts aside, *Tartuffe* at Topanga is a hearty comedy with substantive humor perfectly fusing itself with meaty commentary and non-stop entertainment. What ultimately makes *Tartuffe* worthy of watching at the Will Geer is the perfect stage setting of the Theatricum Botanicum. Indeed, there is nothing better than burning a few calories due to laughter while cuddling up with a loved one (be it your date, spouse, child, or friend) under the stars.

Two of Europe's most gifted and influential writers take to the outdoor stage at the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum in Topanga Canyon at the outset of summer, as Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Moliere's *Tartuffe* help break in yet another season of theatre in the rolling hills halfway between Malibu and the San Fernando Valley.

Whether taking in a matinee



Misha Bouvion as Elmire & Ted Barton as Orgon.

Also adding character to the production is the retelling of the story as it was originally told. Just like Moliere did in 1664, *Tartuffe* is presented in front of King Louis XIV. (Of course, the real King Louis XIV witnessed the story in Versailles, while a thespian sitting in the Botanicum audience takes on the characterizations of the French royalty.)

Directed by Ellen Geer, *Tartuffe* is newly adapted for Topanga audiences, complete with new songs composed by Ms. Geer and arranged by Cody T. Gillette; Peter Alsop penned the lyrics.

Barton is first-rate as Orgon, while Geer and Batemen are beautifully memorable as Dorine and Marianne, respectively. Hendry is perfectly villainous as the titular character.

*Tartuffe* also stars Joanna Bateman as Marianne, Daniel Billet as Damis, Alan Blumenfeld as Cleante, Misha Bouvion as Elmire, Bill Durham as M. Loyal, Liz Eldridge as Flipote, Willow Geer as Dorine, Katherine Griffith as Madam Pernelle, and Jackson McCord Thompson as Valere.

### ***The Merry Wives of Windsor***

Officially launching on June 4th and running through September 10th, Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* chronicles a lovable scoundrel who hopes to con two wealthy women by wooing them with identical love letters. The only thing that stands in his way is each woman's husband.

The con man, Falstaff, arrives in Windsor and executes his plan almost immediately. However, soon thereafter, the two wives discover Falstaff's low-ball scheme and decide to bite back with a plot of their own. What ensues is a swashbuckling comedy featuring jealousy, calculating suitors, a duping of villains, and ultimate vindication.

Considered the "original sitcom," *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is sure to tickle your funny bone through and through again. hilariously over the top, the highlight of the production is Alan Blumenfeld -- the talented actor who rambunctiously portrays the portly rascal Falstaff -- and Ted Barton -- the flamboyantly skilled portrayer of the enviously jealous Master Ford.



Alan Blumenfeld & Bodo with cast - photo by Miriam Geer

The first third of the production is a little slow in developing, yet the pace presses the pedal to the metal at the very moment Master Ford prods, perpetuates, and manipulates Falstaff into action.

Also starring Tim Halligan, Jerry Hoffman (Shallow), Melora Marshall (Mistress Quickly), Karen Reed (Mistress Page), Gerald C. Rivers (Sir Hugh Evans), Elizabeth Tobias (Mistress Ford), Paul Turbiak (Dr. Caius), and Dylan Booth Vigus (Abraham), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is just as comically entertaining as *Tartuffe*.

(There are certain roles that are double cast, depending on date of performance, including Michael Aurelio as Fenton, Claire Fogarty as Anne Page, and Taylor Jackson Ross as Robin.)

Other cast members include Austin Andries, Amy Greenspan, Crystal Marie Clark, Christian LaMonte, Max Lawrence, Ella Martin, William Reinbold, Eric Ritter, Franc Ross, Maurice Shaw, and Kabin Thomas.

Indeed, both productions are perfectly paired together at the Botanicum. (The French and British may beg to differ.)

*Tartuffe* runs on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays at the Will Geer through October 1st,

while *The Merry Wives of Windsor* concludes on September 10th, also on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Please check the Theatricum [website](#) for exact start times and ticket prices.

*An outdoor amphitheater terraced into the hillside of a rustic canyon, the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum is located at 11419 North Topanga Canyon Boulevard in Topanga, about halfway between Pacific Coast Highway and the Ventura Freeway.*