

UPSTAGE

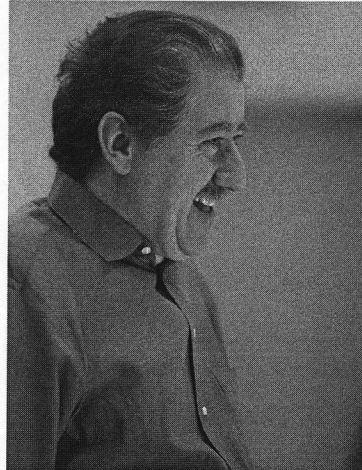
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Tartuffe



Le Director *as* EXPLORER

Before he started rehearsals with his cast, *Tartuffe* director Joe Dowling shared his thoughts about Roundabout's production of Molière's most famous play.



Joe Dowling

UPSTAGE

CONTRIBUTORS

MARGARET SALVANTE McCANN
Education Director

PHILIP A. ALEXANDER
Education Program Manager

RENÉE FLEMINGS
Curriculum Advisor

MEGAN WALTZ
Education Project Coordinator

LINDSAY ERB
Education Associate

TIM McCANNA
Design

COVER:
Artwork for the Roundabout Theatre
Company production of *Tartuffe*.
Illustration by Scott McKowen.

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY
231 West 39th Street
Suite 1200
New York, NY 10018
telephone: 212.719.9393
fax: 212.869.8817
www.roundabouttheatre.org

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UPSTAGE: How do you approach a play as a director?

Dowling: When I approach the play, I discover what the themes are in the text, who the characters are. Then, working with the designers, I make choices about whether or not the play is going to fit within a particular, naturalistic or abstract environment. For this production, John Lee Beatty, the scenic designer, and I talked about how important it is that people understand the world of the play.

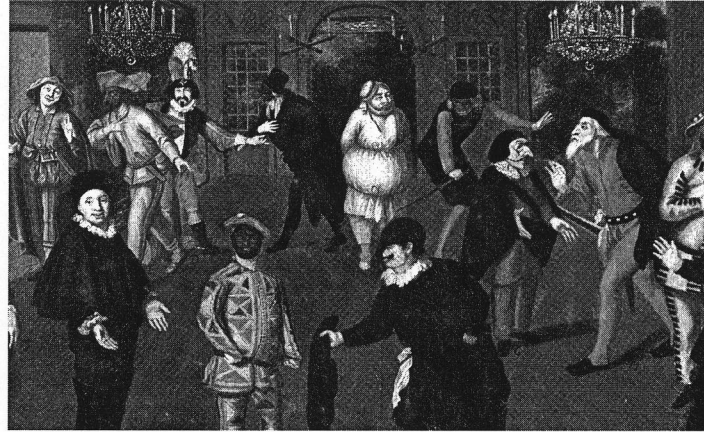
In rehearsal, I tend to be much more focused on what the play is saying, and how the writer wants to get this across. I believe my role as director is to serve the text, I don't believe it's necessarily to serve an idea outside of the text. Although, I admire directors that can do that style well.

What is the process you use to work with actors?

Dowling: Together, we explore the whole play, not just the individual characters. We spend a great deal of time in rehearsal working hard on deciding what each moment means, how this moment relates to that moment, working our way through it. It's very hard to describe it in abstract, because it's very personal. My rehearsals are very intense, but they're about allowing the actor room to explore the text, not about imposing it on them. I believe actors need the opportunity to explore, and the only way they can do that is by having a director there to support and to edit, and to recognize that some things will work and some things won't.



Molière in the costume of Sganarelle.
From the original engraving by Simonin in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.
New York Public Library Picture Collection.



"Les Délices du Genre Humain", 1670
French Farceurs and Italian masked actors. At far left; Molière.
New York Public Library Picture Collection.

“*Tartuffe* WAS BANNED the first time it was done. It clearly irritated people, which satire often does.”

What are the main themes of this play?

Dowling: Molière has a lot to say about the world in which he lives. The play addresses the whole idea of patriarchy and the way in which society, particularly in France at the time, related very clearly to a single monarch. It also comments on the whole idea of a religious sect, which the character of Tartuffe is part of, influencing and affecting the society around them. It also looks at the destruction of the family bonds, which should normally hold people together, by hypocrisy and by fanaticism. All of those are issues that he deals with in the play.

How is a play written in 1669 relevant to an audience of 2002?

Dowling: All of Molière's plays, *Tartuffe* and *The Misanthrope* principally, have resonance that lasts beyond their own time and into ours. That Molière is caught in this play in the hypocrisy, particularly of the sexual nature, is something that our era can relate to. But the real core of this play lies in the society in which it's set, and Molière's view of the world around him. By writing this controversial play he was attempting to raise questions about sex, marriage, and the kind of religious wars that were going on at that time. It's very important to me that the play feels like a play of its period,

that we find a way of doing it within its own time, making it alive, relevant and immediate without losing that wonderful richness that Molière brought to the language.

What makes Molière an important playwright?

Dowling: I think the most important influence Molière had as a writer was as a link between the more improvised world of the Commedia dell'Arte and the formalized, structured writing that came later. But he's much more than a transitional figure, he is also a social satirist. *Tartuffe* was banned the first time it was done. It clearly irritated people, which satire often does. Also, he's a great comedian who was wonderful at creating characters. You look at the lead character in his play *The Miser*, and you might think, "Well, it's a pure caricature." But when you start to analyze the play and the relationships in it, you see that he goes much deeper than the typical Commedia character of the miser. There's a wonderful combination in his comedy of his ability to create character—to give us a richness in the difference of relationships—and then to turn around and provide a very funny, almost slapstick scene, which was also something Shakespeare could do. **UPSTAGE**

AT AGE 21,
JEAN-BAPTISTE POQUELIN

faced several options for his future. He could take over his father's successful upholstery shop and make a reasonable income for the rest of his life. Or he could be a lawyer-- he had an excellent education, and was destined for a position in the court. But this young man of promise decided to follow his true love and shocked his family by throwing himself into the unpredictable world of theatre.



New York Public Library Picture Collection.

Molière:

A Theatre Man Who Went His Own Way

HE ESTABLISHED AN ACTING TROUPE CALLED THE THEATRE ILLUSTRE,

and thereby joined a profession that was held in low-esteem, and whose practitioners were often compared with con-artists and usually denied a proper religious burial. To save his family the embarrassment of having an actor in the family, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin changed his name and henceforth was known as Molière.

With his theatre company, Molière experienced a bumpy journey of small successes and several failures touring the provinces. He eventually became the head of a larger theatrical troupe, where he began to write plays. His "big break" came when he was invited to present one of his own comedies, *The Love-Sick Doctor*, to King Louis XIV. The King loved Molière's style and witty commentary, and he took the actors under his patronage, the troupe then being dubbed "The King's Company."

With this aristocratic audience, Molière used his comedy to make a statement about the society he observed in his time. For example, Molière's play *The Pretentious Ladies* satirized a particular member of the King's court who saw herself as the final judge of all taste and culture in Paris. The play proved so successful that Molière doubled the price of admission and was invited to give a special performance for the King. Also, *School for Wives*, which commented on an adulterous marriage, was

considered by some to be offensive, in poor taste, and undermining the principles of religion. Generally, the King was delighted with Molière, and he rewarded the playwright with gifts of cash. At the same time, though, Molière's controversial plays had turned some of the King's followers into powerful enemies.

None of Molière's play ignited as much controversy as *Tartuffe*, however. Molière wrote the play as an attack upon hypocrisy, but it was interpreted by members of the Catholic church as a direct attack on religion. Even though the King supported Molière, the religious right wing of France demanded that the play be taken off the stage. Threatened with death and imprisonment, Molière defended himself by saying: "The duty of comedy being to correct men by entertaining them, I thought I had nothing better to do than to attack, by making them ridiculous, the vices of my age. And, as hypocrisy is one of the more common vices, one of the most troublesome and most dangerous, I had the thought that I would be doing a service to all the honest people if I made a comedy which would accuse the hypocrites." Though this defense is in particular reference to one of his plays, Molière's statement reflects the dual purpose of all of his works; Molière's duty as a playwright is both to entertain and to educate. **UPSTAGE**

French Cuffs

Jane Greenwood Describes
Creating the Costumes for *Tartuffe*

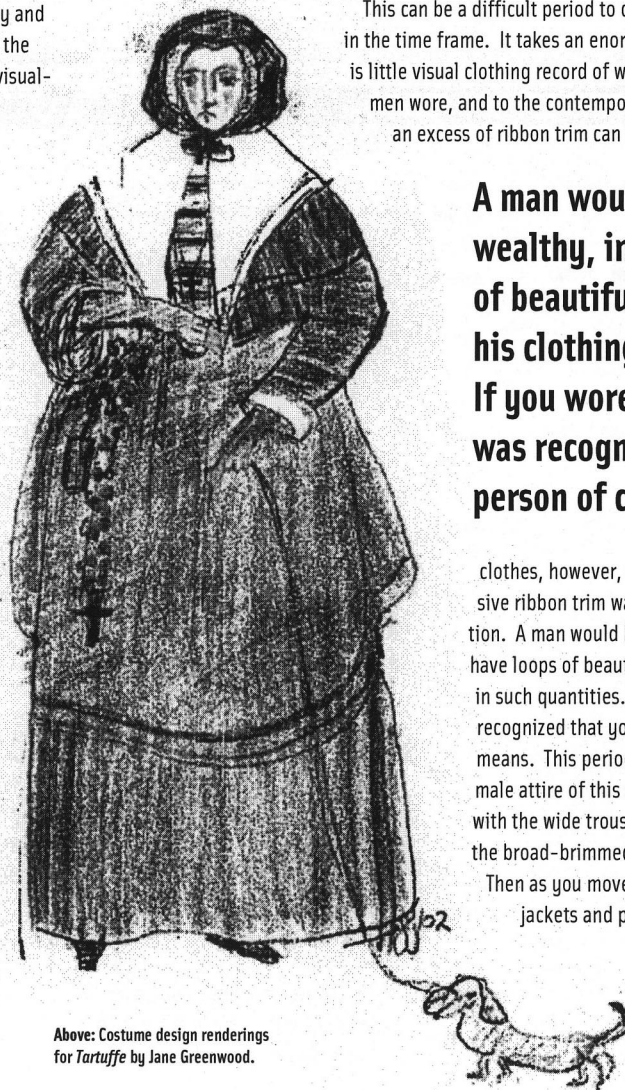
WHEN I FIRST START WORKING ON A PLAY, I try first to read through it without thinking about the costumes. Then I go through it again, this time sifting it carefully and circling any reference to the way the characters look, the way they behave and anything else that helps me to visualize their appearance.

The relationships in *Tartuffe* should certainly inform the clothes of the characters. For instance, Tartuffe, the religious outsider, has great influence on Orgon, so their clothes should be similar and plainer than the lavish style of Orgon's family who resent and resist Tartuffe's philosophy. The only exception is Madame Pernelle, Orgon's mother, who is sympathetic to what Tartuffe preaches. She is a rigidly religious woman, whose clothes, I feel, should reflect a slightly earlier period. Older people often stayed in the fashion of their prime then. Their style changed only very slowly, if at all.

This is the third production of *Tartuffe* I've designed. This time, I've taken quite a few cues from John Lee Beatty, the set designer, and Joe Dowling, the director. John Lee's set drawings, which I saw at our first meeting with Joe, resembled a Dutch painting of the period. The Dutch were very influenced by the design skill of the French, but there are many more Dutch paintings of that era, and they have a wonderful clarity regarding the domestic quality of the era. In my research I became aware of how painters like Vermeer and Jan Steen captured the light on the fabric they depicted. The colors you see in the women's gowns are rich and vibrant and the silks have a beautiful sheen to them. Though the fabrics are luxurious there's simplicity to the gowns. Nothing is over decorated.

There's also a lack of pattern in the silk, allowing richly delicious colors to enhance and balance the understated line of the dresses.

This can be a difficult period to design since there are few plays set in the time frame. It takes an enormous amount of research as there is little visual clothing record of what any but the most fashionable men wore, and to the contemporary eye, petticoat breeches with an excess of ribbon trim can look a bit silly. The shape of the



Above: Costume design renderings for *Tartuffe* by Jane Greenwood.

A man would have to be very wealthy, indeed, to have loops of beautiful ribbon attached to his clothing in such quantities. If you wore such fashions it was recognized that you were a person of considerable means.

clothes, however, was quite masculine. The excessive ribbon trim was a form of conspicuous consumption. A man would have to be very wealthy, indeed, to have loops of beautiful ribbon attached to his clothing in such quantities. If you wore such fashions it was recognized that you were a person of considerable means. This period follows that of the Cavalier. The male attire of this earlier era was very masculine, with the wide trousers, tall boots, fitted jackets and the broad-brimmed hats, like the Three Musketeers.

Then as you move forward in time, strange short jackets and petticoat breeches begin to appear.

In a way, I feel I would like to dress Damis, the son of Orgon, in the earlier

Continued on page 6.

Scenic Designer John Lee Beatty shares some thoughts on his process with UPSTAGE.

CREATING the WORLD of TARTUFFE



UPSTAGE: How did you start your work on this production of *Tartuffe*?

BEATTY: I started by researching the play and looking at France in the 1600's, because the director wanted to set it in the period in which it was written. When I looked at the research, I was interested in the fact that French painters of the period were emulating the Dutch painters, even though the Dutch paintings were influenced by French design. Then I got the idea of designing the play generally in the style of Vermeer, a Dutch painter of this period who was visually stimulating to the French. The heart of the design is to lead you into feeling the sense of Vermeer, or any painter of that period. As a designer, I try to find the things that we relate to that are also similar to our time, and try to erase those things that are not similar.

What input and ideas did Joe Dowling, the director, give you about this production?

BEATTY: One thing he said during our discussions—and this was the key to where we got to—was, "I



At top & above: Set design for Act One of *Tartuffe* by John Lee Beatty.

want to have a sense of where Molière came from, from the Commedia dell'Arte beginnings." Joe and I also talked about Molière's genius, that he wrote these plays that managed to be both realistic and unrealistic. Another important thing the director told me was how he thought the actors were going to move. He wanted them to be able to swoop around the stage. As the costume designer can tell you, the dresses (with hoops and petticoats) are pretty wide, somewhere between three and four feet. That idea about movement gives you a whole new message as a designer, about how open the settings have to be and how the actors really physically express themselves.

What do you look for in a script to develop your designs?

BEATTY: When I designed *Tartuffe* before, as a younger man, I created "oldy timey" Paris, and I thought about the play rather formally. I didn't stop to think that that approach was a really superficial take on the play. Now, as more of an adult, I see these characters as having a midlife crisis and as being of a certain rich class. Orgon, the lead character, is not just rich, he's lower-upper class, or mercantile rich. He's done some work that's made him rich. This is a guy who's made a lot of money, married a second time and has a younger, pretty wife, and he's hung up on some issues. The play is about him working his way through those issues with the help of some very intelligent women. With this production, I'm trying to feel the character from inside out, rather than from the outside in.

I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO THINK THAT THE SETTING WAS A HUGE EFFORT, AND YOU DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO THINK YOU TRIED TOO HARD. YOU WANT TO MAKE IT LOOK EASY. YOU WANT TO MAKE WHAT'S HAPPENING ON STAGE SEEM NATURAL.

So how do the character's personalities carry through to your artistic decisions for this production?

BEATTY: His house now is not just old time Paris—it is old time Paris—but he's bought a lot of stuff, and certain things are really important to him in terms of conspicuous consumption (this guy would have a BMW today). He's bought a lot of religious stuff, but he's gotten hung up on religion and the superficial elements, and that's a problem. I really tried to think of every item of the house as a possession, rather than just trying to make a decorative Parisian house. For everything that he wanted, Orgon would've said "I want the best doors, I want that staircase, I want those paintings,

French Cuffs continued.

style, but realistically it would be false. The younger man would have been dressing in the height of current fashion, thereby emphasizing the contrast between Orgon and himself.

It is very important, I feel, that there be a collaboration between the actors and the costume designer. Some actors feel encumbered with an excess of weight in their clothing, so I try to accommodate their needs by using as light a weight of fabric as is possible without compromising the silhouette. Shoes are always a concern and it's important that actors' feet are flexibly comfortable. This period can be a bit tricky for the men as high heels were very much the fashion. Though I appreciate input from the actors and encourage dialogue about their needs, I don't always change my design. If the dialogue is a good one, what the actor needs generally can fit within the period of the play. There are always solutions the actor and the designer can agree on. **UPSTAGE**



Costume design rendering for *Tartuffe* by Jane Greenwood.

I want that drapery, and I want those chandeliers." So we're making the set a whole conglomeration of things that he would have chosen.

How can you depict the theme of hypocrisy through the setting?

BEATTY: One point I make is through the religious paintings Orgon displays on the wall. I think of them as if he's bought them as investments, and he started collecting. Then his collecting got out of control, and then he finally got into the religion. Consumerism is a type of religion, and his consumerism has led him to religion, which is hypocritical, absolutely. I think that's parallel to what Molière was saying. Molière wasn't against religion, he was against hypocrisy in religion. **UPSTAGE**

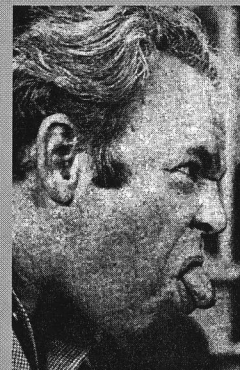
Activities

DISCOVERING YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE

Before you go

Explore how social satire is present in our lives. Audiences in the 21st century can see Molière's spirit of social satire alive in popular culture. Television situation comedies include several with satirical approaches, such as "All in the Family", "Married with Children", "Malcolm in the Middle" and "The Simpsons" and "Saturday Night Live". As you watch these shows, or a play or movie that includes social satire, keep the following questions in mind.

1. What is the social issue that's being commented on? Politics? Social behavior? Family roles?
2. What is the point of view of the writer? How do you know this?
3. How is humor used? Is it physical or verbal? Is exaggeration or miscommunication used?



At the Theatre

Watch and Listen for the elements of social satire in *Tartuffe*.

Here are some ideas to think about:

1. What is the social issue that's being commented on?
2. What is Molière's point of view regarding the issue? Which character(s) seem to be speaking on his behalf? How can you tell?
3. How does Molière use humor to support his point of view?
4. How is Molière's use of satire similar to contemporary forms, and how is it different?



After the Show

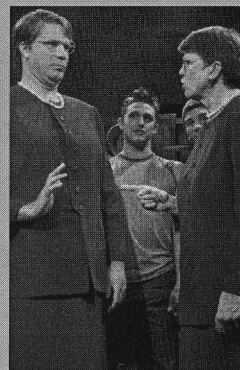
Write a review. What do you think? After reading about the play and the playwright, let us know what you thought about the performance you saw. As you develop your piece, here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you agree or disagree with the choices the actors made in terms of their interpretation of Molière's theme?
2. What was your favorite part of this production?
3. If you were the director, what might you have done differently in order to support the purpose of this piece?

Send your work to Roundabout, and we'll share it with the people who created *Tartuffe*.

Mail it to: Education Department
Roundabout Theatre Co.
231 W. 39th St., Suite 1200
New York, NY 10018

Or email to:
waltz@roundabouttheatre.org



Top: Carol O'Connor in "All in the Family"; Middle: Marge and Homer in "The Simpsons"; Bottom: Will Ferrell and Janet Reno in a scene from "Saturday Night Live".

New York Public Library Picture Collection.

When you get to the theatre...

NO, WE CAN'T THROW POPCORN AT THE ACTORS LIKE IN THE MOVIES,
but below are some helpful tips for making your theatre-going experience more enjoyable.

TICKET POLICY

As a student participant in *Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

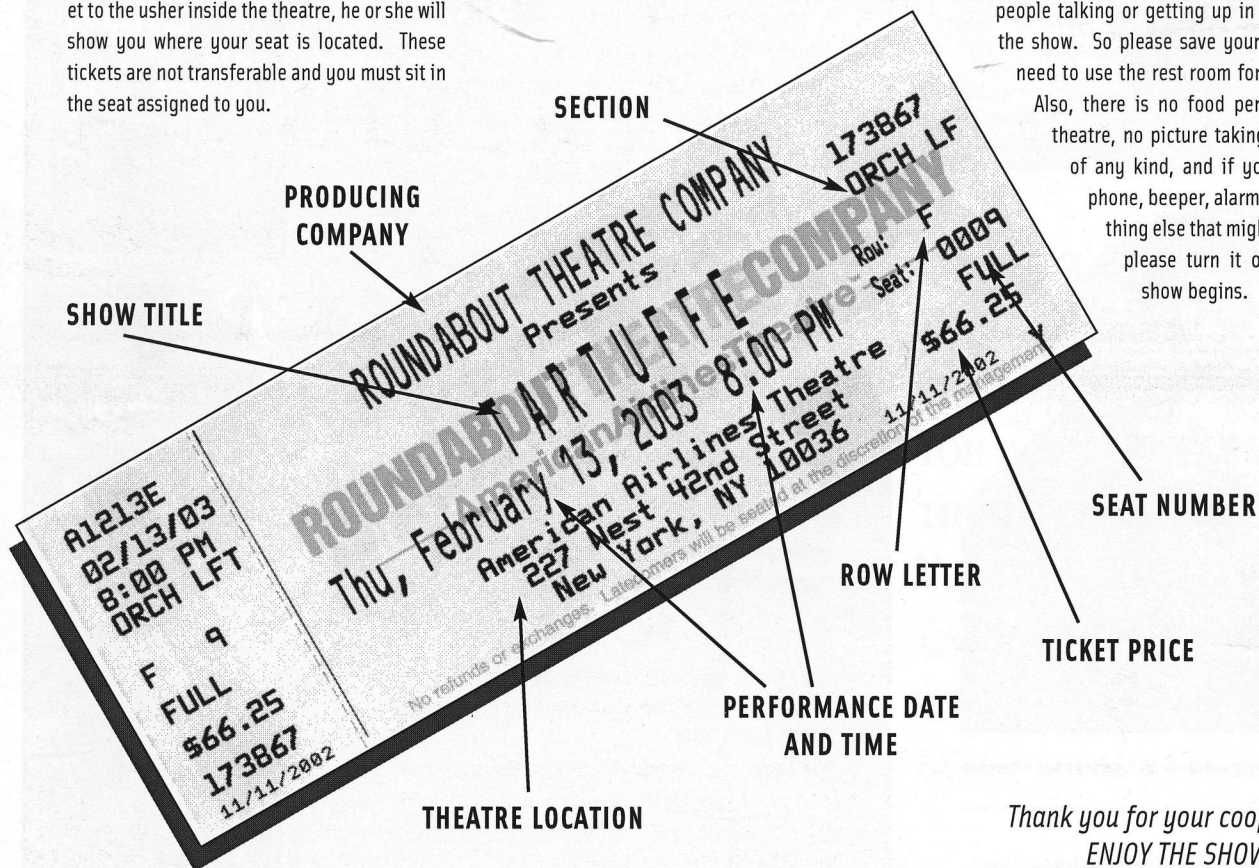
PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission.

Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



*Thank you for your cooperation.
 ENJOY THE SHOW!*

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