A delightful amidst dreariness

by Sandy Yulke

In the "pressure cooker" atmosphere from which the Miser was propelled, suffering a production such as that of Molière's The Miser mounted by the MIT Continental Theater, which ends comes as a great relief. Through clever direction and just the right amount of grand style acting, they have turned this great play into the best production I have seen in a long time.

The basic plot (boy-who-suddenly-makes-a-millionaire) is filled by a man and called a clever commodity for Shakespeare, but is even more rich as handled by Molière. The cast, largely European, aside to the audience, he created archetypes who seem somehow believable.

One of Molière's trademarks is the importance of servants in the machinations of French noble households which were his milieu. La Fleche (Steve Grechenski) and Mistress Jacques (Miriam Shoop) were both admirable examples of wise and reserved servants without whom nothing would ever be accomplished.

Both roles were played to a tee, and perhaps too well. However, reading of the items to be sent show not only taking the right amount of slack, but being the reason itself, an extraordinary control of voice and mood as he shifted back and forth in the conversation.

The role of the coachperson and cook is usually filled by a man and called Matre Jacques, and I was curious, upon reading the program and looking at the directions had cast a woman in the role. But when Sheehan delivered her first open-mouthed expressions, it was obvious that she was perfect for the part.

The major characters were also excellent, most notably Larry Kirchgaesser as Harpagon, Jack Przybylo as Ebute, and Barbara Bobinski as Frosine. The role of Harpagone requires the affability of a very old and advanced degree of neurons (with respect to money) and both qualities were admirably conveyed. I had never before seen Cleante played quite so much as a top, but that performance was sure to week me as it was carried off with precisely the right amount of self-seriousness. Frosine, the "adventures" according to the program, has some difficult moments in try to keep her emotions through the use of Cleante, and Bobinski handled these quite expertly.

Valere (Courntey Tucker) and Elise (Karen Barton) were appropriately joy and yet scarce lower, rounding out an altogether delightful cast.

The set design by Marty Nesseltush was extremely serviceable, if not particularly imaginative. Ellen's spacious costume designs more than compensated, however, and her overall visual effect was quite good. Cleante's dardar garb was particularly appealing.

The play was a triumph, and much of the credit must go to Andrea Gordon, the director. Flickr as the small things were perfect for painting and Vale's kissing in the harem of Elise's town, she produced an excellent interpretation. The use of the chicken instead of the usual stick was an interesting, and I hope that this is a true indication of this nation's talent, and that she will continue in her successful ways. The Miser is a delight, and just what we needed at this dreary time of year.

Alchemy lives at Harvard

by Michael Jung

The story line is familiar: a clever con man and his fast-taking sidekick swindle innocent and stooges alike. Promising fortune, fame, and love to his hopeful victims, he leads them on, and whisking them out of predicament after predicament with great comic effect. This time, I saw scenes from Paper Moon.

The Set: The Flam-Flam Man, perhaps.

Ben Jonson's The Alchemist, current weaving between the Loeb Drama Center, predicates each of these by over 350 years. Yet this fast-paced farce appeals to the modern audience just as it did to audiences in Jonson's time. Shrewd comedy, lively action, and bawdy puns combine to produce a timeless enjoyable show.

The cast of the Harvard Dramatic Club's production is almost without exception, extremely capable. Philip Kilburne, in the title role of Subtle, leaves a convincingly clever alchemist/corn artist. His victims are lured in (and they are all worth them) through the wits of the clever impostor, Flare, played to perfection by Charles Weber. These two, together with their "colleagues," the bawdy lady Dol Common (portrayed by Sarah Jane Littigate), have set up shop in the house of Face's master Lovewit, who has left the city to avoid the plague.

The victims which Face brings in are from all walks of life. Each is a stooges of a class of English society of Jonson's century. In the middle, a skeptical gambler, and Walter Matherly represents by the Philosopher's Stone, the miraculous catalyst which transforms lead into gold, while the latter takes the form of Dom Commus and a disinterested young widow (Anita Stein), who is used by the gang in their attempt to swindle everyone at once. Madcap encounters follow one another to quick succession, and yet each victim arrives to claim his prize. But the tricksters' plans are foiled by the premature return of Master Lovewit, played by Will English, and only the sly servant Face emerges unscathed from the ensuing mayhem.

The set design by Gleen Benenheim is eye-catching, with large, gaudy sun, moon, and clouds moving back and forth in the heavens, and giant panels with mystical hand shapes. Despite its interesting and imaginative nature, however, the set does not do justice to the action. The lighting is quite unimaginative and fails to capture theeczene of the play. The costumes are well done, in bright flashy colors, and help to make the characters stand out.

Sir Epic Maynard (played by Spiro Veloudos) is a swaggering, gluttonous knight, while Dapper (Stephen Kelkith) is a simpering and somewhat off-key comic relief. Others taken in by the alchemist and his crew include Denis Pelli as a dim-witted tobacco merchant, John Carlo as a skeptical gauvler, and John Almeida as a quite good. Cleante's dandiacal garb was extremely wellcostumed, and yet sincere lovers, rounding out an altogether delightful cast.

The production begins rather slowly and unevenly, and only by the second act does it gather sufficient momentum to justify to the expectation of a well written script. The setting is generally good throughout, but remains rough in places. The humorous lines of the characters are muffled by their, downcast heads and wide-brimmed hats. Similarly, the opening quarrel between the alchemist and his partner is rushed through hurriedly, depriving the scenes of much of the background of the play. Most of the roles are slightly underplayed, and fall to bring out all of the characters' potential.

Nonetheless, the production remains a delightful and worthwhile theatrical experience. I heartily recommend it as an entertaining and diverting evening.

At the Loeb Drama Center, through March 8th.

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