

Hypocrisy and Lust Never Go Out of Style

By NAOMI SIEGEL

ing patterns, but he still contends that their unrhymed counterpart better reflects the nuance of the original French.

"Tartuffe" did not enter the repertory easily. With its open attack on professional piety, five years of banning by both church

leaders and a beleaguered king almost relegated the work to obscurity. Watching Os-

born Foch, as Tartuffe, summon all of the outward trappings of a saintly counterfeiter—

his hands wrung in pious recitade, his lips pursed in a beatific half-smile, his lanky

frame bowed before a large crucifix—you can imagine the church's discomfort. When

this obsequious poseur is finally caught in

flagrant delicto, poised above the prostrate

form of the lovely Elmire, while Orgon, her

cuckolded husband and his adoring patron, is sequestered under the table, the idea of

holier-than-thou is taken to a new level.

Amanda Baker is charming as the gently

testes both by Tartuffe and by her bamboo-

zled husband. Robert Grossman plays

Orgon with the sanctimonious bullheaded-

ness of a true believer. Turning against wife,

son and daughter in favor of his duplicitous

guest, he bumbles his way to near ruin.

As Damiis, Orgon's disinherited son,

Christophher Conant provides an engaging

rashness. Colleen Smith Wallinau is out-

standing as the acid-tongued Madame Per-

nelle, and Steven L. Barron brings dignity to

Cleante, Elmire's brother, a voice of reason

in a household of hysterics.

"Tartuffe" is at Centenary Stage, 400 Jef-

erson Street, Hackensack, through Oct. 24.

Information: (908) 979-0900 or at www.centenarystageco.org.

WHEN an adapter decides to meddle with a classic, there's no telling what surprises may be in store. If your recollection of "Tartuffe," Molière's 17th-century satire on religious hypocrisy, infidelity and money just, includes an opening scene that features that know-it-all battle-ax, Grandma Pernelle (well all right, Madame Pernelle, to give the biddy her due), delivering a hectoring "family values" lecture, then be prepared for a shock here at Centenary Stage's season-opening production.

This "Tartuffe," in an adaptation by Miles Malleon, starts with a tacked-on preamble, excerpted from a one-act farce by Molière called "Imromptu at Versailles." The pairing is not unprecedented. Evidence suggests that Molière sometimes offered the two works as a double bill.

Mr. Malleon uses this backstage brouhaha involving the playwright, his actor, a rich boor of a patron and a representative of King Louis XIV to segue into "Tartuffe." Whether this prelude is effective as a scene setter, or whether the showbiz bickering is really more tedious than titillating, is a matter of debate. But the main stage offering that follows is so totally delightful, any preliminary quiescence quickly becomes moot.

Carl Wallinau has directed his gifted players with style and sharp comic timing. He has done his homework, using the unrhymed text of Mr. Malleon rather than one of the popular rhymed verse translations. As director, he recognizes that these versions do

get big laughs from their humorous rhythm-