

Title: **'Tartuffe' is timeless, very timely**
 Author: By Sonya Ellingboe sellingboe@coloradocommunitymedia.com
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'Tartuffe' is timeless, very timely

Arvada's Black Box rep company offers classic

By Sonya Ellingboe
sellingboe@coloradocommunitymedia.com

The smiling, smarmy con man is ever with us! "Tartuffe," written by French comedic master Moliere, was first performed in 1664 at Versailles and quite promptly banned at the request of the Archbishop of Paris — although King Louis XIV was generally supportive of the famous playwright. There were hypocrites in the 17th century too — abundant material for a writer to satirize.

Contemporary local audiences will enjoy a well-paced 21st-century spin on the original, with Richard Wilbur's poetic translation, especially clever costumes, a nifty set and a top-notch cast that is obviously having fun with this gem.

They perform on a thrust stage that is dominated by a black-and-white faux marble floor, elaborate 17th-century backdrop wall and a prominent altar front and center—appropriate since Tartuffe is a man of the church and prayer is in order on occasion.

The Arvada Center, in its 40th year,

is trying a different approach with its charming, smaller Black Box Theatre. Veteran director Lynne Collins has come on board as artistic director for plays and the beginnings of a repertory company is introduced — a first at the center.

"Tartuffe" will run through Nov. 6. Then, in February through May, "Bus Stop," "Drowning Girls" and "Waiting for Godot" will be scheduled as each is developed, with all three on the April calendar, many of the same actors in each cast. Collins will direct "Bus Stop" and "Drowning Girls" and Geoffrey Kent, who will act in "Bus Stop," will direct "Waiting for Godot."

The title role is deftly portrayed by expert actor Michael Morgan, who plays the devious character in contrast to wealthy but simple-minded Orgon, played by equally expert Sam Gregory, a Denver Center Theatre Company and Colorado Shakespeare Festival frequent player. The pair is as skilled at silly slapstick moves and lines as they are at more serious roles.

Jessica Austgen stands out as a sassy, outspoken maid, who immediately spots Tartuffe as a phony and serves as a narrator of sorts. Leslie O'Carroll plays Madame Pernelle, the grandmother — Orgon's mother and

IF YOU GO

"Tartuffe" plays through Nov. 6 in the Black Box Theatre at the Arvada Center, 6901 Wadsworth Blvd., Arvada. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; 1 p.m. Wednesdays; 2 p.m. Sundays. For talkbacks and tickets, go to arvadacenter.org/Tartuffe. Phone: 720-898-7200.

a sucker for Tartuffe's declarations. Orgon's savvy brother-in-law Cleant is portrayed by Josh Robinsom.

Kate Gleason, as Orgon's frustrated wife, sees through the deceptive man's plans and tries to trap him. Her sapphire blue costume is a particularly clever spin on period dress. Sean Scrutchins (Damis) and Emily Van Fleet (Mariane) play Orgon's young adult children, while DU drama student Anthony Adu is the servant Valere, Mariane's secret love.

One needs to tune the ears into the script's rhyming couplets, which we seldom encounter, but the sound is good and language and delivery are extra clear.

And this is a truly funny work. Don't miss it!