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Molière's 'The School for Wives' makes a welcome return

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Simon Toal and Colm O'Brien in Molière's *The School for Wives*
Al Craig

Molière's *The School for Wives* adapted and directed by Peter Reid

Rating: ★★★★★

Molière's classic farce, "The School for Wives" caused something of a public outcry when first performed in 1662. Poking satirical fun at the rich, the poor, lovers and the loveless, Molière was an equal opportunity satirist and no one escaped his withering gaze. In Peter Reid's adaptation, currently back by popular demand at The New Theatre, the satire doesn't quite have the same relevance today. But Reid ensures that Molière's bold and bawdy humor are very much in evidence, reminding us why Molière is still considered one of the world's best, comic playwrights.

While Reid modifies "The School For Wives" structure in places, most notably the ending, its central tale of a middle aged man, Arnolphe, seeking to marry his innocent, young ward Agnes,

who having spent years in a nunnery is ignorant of the ways of the world, is very much intact. Whilst retaining Molière's love of language, Reid opts for less poetry and more accessibility, and the production is all the better for it. Indeed Reid cleverly avoids the pitfall of trying to make the satire relevant, only slightly accentuating the gender imbalance at the heart of the play by highlighting Arnolphe's vanity rather than his fear and by giving Agnes something of an awakening, even if the transition to this isn't all it might have been. Instead Reid opts to mine the comic possibilities at the heart of "The School For Wives" and this he does terrifically well, letting its convoluted plot, stock characters and absurd situations do all the heavy lifting.

A first class cast ensure all is delivered with the verve and energy Molière deserves. Conor Donelan and Deborah Wiseman as the money grubbing, husband and wife peasants, Alain and Georgette, are always engaging, even if they do sound like The Wurzels much of the time. Joseph McCarthy as the lovelorn and histrionic Horace, Agnes' hapless lover, is wonderfully convincing, as is Colm O'Brien as the affected and snobbish Chrysalde. Grace Fitzgerald as the innocent abroad Agnes, was a sheer delight. As was Simon Toal as the conceited Arnolphe, channeling silent comedian Ben Turpin, along with Terry Thomas and Dick Dastardly, in equally measure to terrific effect. Direction by Peter Reid ensured pace never slackened and unapologetically mined every laugh possible, feeling at times like a Max Sennett comedy meets "Carry On" movie, at others like a pantomime. All of which was played out in an excellent set design by, yes, you guessed it, Reid once again.

For contemporary audiences "The School for Wives" won't resonate on any ideological level. Its depiction of a vain, conceited male, a paragon of patriarchy, and his blissfully innocent female ward doesn't add much to the current gender debate outside of highlighting the obvious. But then again, Molière would probably have satirized those who tried to intellectualize what is essentially a laugh out loud experience. And as laugh out loud experiences go, "The School for Wives" is one of the best around to be had in this thoroughly enjoyable production.

Molière's "The School for Wives" adapted and directed by Peter Reid and produced by AC Productions runs at The New Theatre until November 28th

Tickets €16/€12.50

Show begins at 7.30 p.m.

For further information visit [The New Theatre](#)



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