

(This first section of information was submitted to the design team over the summer; it was updated in January 2011.)

SPRING 2011 THEATER DEPARTMENT Black Box production (Colman Theater)

TITLE: An adaptation of Moliere's comedy, *Le Bourgeois Gentleman, or, The Shopkeeper Turned Gentleman*

Royalties: None (The two-three versions I will work from are in public domain.)

Scripts: The basic script is on-line. I will then edit it down to 70 (?) minutes and make appropriate changes after consulting other translations.

Cast Size: 7-9 actors (Depending on number of available students for acting and tech)

SYNOPSIS:

A merchant from the middle class has made so much money he has decided to live like a member of the aristocracy. He hires Music, Dance, Fencing, and Philosophy tutors to prepare him to mingle with upper-class society. His tailor is to make him the very best clothes, which he puts on with the help of "gifted" dancers and musicians. Although married he is in love with a noblewoman and uses an intermediary to send her gifts. Everyone manages to overcharge him, ridicule his foolish nature and, in the end, trick him into allowing his daughter to marry her lover disguised as a foreign prince.

NOTE: CSB/SJU Year of Sustainability

To participate in and support the **CSB/SJU Year of Sustainability**, the cast and artistic team will create the scenery, props and costumes from found and donated objects; we will reuse and adapt old costumes, donated fabric, plastic objects, buckets, organic materials and as many other appropriate items donated to this project. Our goal is to create an imaginary world of comedy through an environmentally friendly process.

***THE WOULD-BE GENTLEMAN* produced in 1670 (five act French farce by Moliere)**

Production Concept and Ideas; A blending (Pizza? Stew? Chocolate swirl cheese-cake?)

"BE YOURSELF!" (In order to do that: "KNOW THYSELF!") But DON'T TAKE YOURSELF SO SERIOUSLY!

What is the play ostensibly about? Moliere ridicules people from the middle class who become rich and try to act as if they are from the educated, etiquette-savvy, game-playing aristocracy (rich or not). He wrote to please Louis XIV and the royal court, a group which didn't appreciate the newly rich and or the upper-middle class thinking that money suddenly means you can enter the world of the "chosen few".

Today we face the same sort of issues. When the "uncouth" plumber wins 6 million dollars from the lottery and buys the clothes and jewelry he has always admired, many people will criticize his taste. (Somehow the rich and powerful assume that everybody wants to be like them, know them and travel in

the same circles.) The main character in this play is ridiculed mostly for being stupid—not for being newly rich. He does whatever the fashionistas say he should do; he tries to learn useless information and, in his own family, to be the authoritarian he believes aristocrats actually are.

In the spirit of the European Renaissance, Moliere creates a character and a story in which the stupid are shown to be fools and the intelligent are admired because of their clever ability to outwit others. (It happens in *Tartuffe* but Louis XIV makes sure “good” wins in the end.) We see this type of story quite often these days: the clever not-so-moral character hoodwinks the “average” person; sometimes today the clever criminal gets away with her/his crime but often audiences want to see a good moral lesson by the end of the play. (If the smart con-person loses his ill-gotten gains but still escapes the law, which is okay.)

It is a long tradition in theater that the whole world is our resource, from aspects of other cultures (clothing, architecture, stories, symbols, etc.) to the natural world around us, to the most recent technological innovations (science, building materials, electronic sounds, video, etc.) Many theater productions have “borrowed” images and ideas from other types of production: dance, opera, puppetry, film, concerts, etc. Our art form rests on long traditions of taking one idea or thing and transforming that idea or thing into something new. Over the years we have seen Jeune Lune’s European style, chamber theater styles, musical styles, Asian, and African American styles, etc. Using found objects to create scenic pieces, props and costumes is not an original idea; but it is a relatively new for us to self-consciously mount a production this way.

The inspiration for producing *The Bourgeois Gentleman* using found and preexisting objects came from three different unrelated events. The first: the costume STUFF worn in our production of *Everyman*, *Every Women*, *Everyone*; the second from a production at University of Morris which I saw last year and third, the announcement of the CSB/SJU year of sustainability. Comedies, especially those of Moliere, lend themselves to this style; Moliere’s plays exist in ridiculous worlds with non-realistic characters. We were inspired by Jeune Lune’s style for our production of *The Imaginary Invalid* and wonderfully unique (and beautiful) costumes, wigs, props, lighting effects and painting effects were created. Our production of *The Bourgeois Gentleman* will exist in a ridiculous world but this world will be created using materials we already have, objects we can find, donated materials, bartered items—items that do not cost us any money.

Because we have three productions next semester I’d like to make this production as simple as possible, not simple in terms of a minimum of production aspects, but simple in the amount of time, money and effort put in by the design faculty and the technical staff. In order to accomplish this goal, we might do some things in a different way than we have in some recent past productions. Below are a few examples:

COSTUMES: the actors and any other students designated by Willene will create the costumes from materials/ wigs/costumes, we currently have in stock (subject to Willene’s approval of use). Actors will also be able to use non-traditional materials (Adam showed me pictures of a skirt made from umbrellas

sans the metal parts) such as plastic bags, coat-hangers (another photograph Adam showed me), plastic plates, etc. The wigs from *Imaginary Invalid* were so wonderful it would be nice to think of the “hair” in the production being made from assorted materials.

I would like to challenge the actors to use certain items. One example would be the plaster of Paris “gold” buttons that we have had for years. Another might be a pile of old (clean!) socks. Another would use the plastic containers often used for leftovers as the materials for “scales” on one costume. As long as Willene deems that the materials are acceptable and the costumes are safe the sky’s the limit.

SETTING: From the beginning I have conceived the production staged in the round with a group of raised platforms in the center of the space forming either a square, an oval, a circle, a hexagon—with one-two steps up to the platform placed on various sides or in different spots (usually where an aisle appears through the seating area). The aisles would come from the four doorways into the Black Box from the hallways. The aisles might be straight, or some might wind around through parts of the audience.

As with the costumes, I would like to challenge the creators to use certain items. Either alone or in collaboration with the Willene, Ken and Mark, we would select some specific items that must be included in some way. Some examples might include: plastic eating utensils, baskets, egg cartons, etc.

Scenic pieces would be limited to objects actors can sit or stand on. “Official” entrances up the step(s) could have some sort of decoration or short post-like pieces. [Mark, Ken and I have had a brief conversation about using the two smaller arches built for BREL as the basis for two “entrances/exits into the Bourgeois home. They could be to exteriors or to interiors.] The most interesting pieces would be the props. *One option would be to have the Mat & Tech students design and/or create some of the silly props from pre-existing materials.* (Many years ago the Mat & Tech class created the props for the underwater world and the court for *Ondine* using a style determined by the director and designers.) Otherwise the cast members could each be assigned a prop to create from a “pile” or list of items. Examples: I have been saving metallic candy wrappers for months as well as small caps from bottles.

COSTUME COORDINATOR: Senior Theater Major Claire Hahn.

LIGHTING: [REDACTED]

Ken Cartwright, Technical Director of the Theater Department, will design the lights.

SOUND: The actors will make all the sound effects with assorted objects and possibly instruments that already exist. The plan is for no recorded sound.

ACTING STYLE: Silly, clown-like, melodramatic, over-the-top, operatic, commedia, realism---whatever best suits the particular “scene” or encounter within the play.

I intend to have actors work in small groups to create short sections of the play. Examples; The dancing master teaches (or tries to teach) a ridiculous “dance”—the actors will create the dance section (quite short) through improvisation. The fencing master, the philosophy master, etc., will work with other cast

members to develop their unique “bit” where they try to teach their “ideal” skills to Jourdain (the B Gentleman).

CAST: There are 13 characters plus servants etc. listed in the cast. It would be fun to have 9 actors of a variety of physical types. Some actors can play more than one role and some roles will be combined. The Music Mater and Pupil characters can be merged, the Merchant Tailor and Journeyman Tailor can be merged, and different characters can take over servant functions as Jourdain gives orders to people without knowing who they are. **NOTE: so many student actors auditioned that we were able to cast 14 people**

NOTE: The “Son of the Grand Turk” is an invented character within the world of the play. He is the young lover in disguise. that the male young lover can finally marry the girl of his dreams in disguise. We’ll make up a different name such as the Son of the Grand PooBahRoo. . . or something along those lines...so we can create any “look” we like.

I will write an extensive scenario and send it to you. The play is very silly—it could use a “whoopee pillow” and rubber chicken, fake dog poop, a water-balloon and other inspiring items.

