

Goldini's play is entertaining

# Mad maze of multitudinous mix-ups

*The Servant of Two Masters*  
Citadel Theatre  
until Feb. 8

review by I. and J. Levental

Have you ever tried working for two bosses at the same time? If you have, you probably know what a messy situation it can be, how the demands of one invariably conflict with the demands of the other.

Consider then, the plight of poor Truffaldino. He finds himself simultaneously employed by two masters, one of whom must keep her identity a secret, and both of whom are in love with each other. To top it off, Truffaldino must conceal the fact that he is working for someone else, otherwise he would be punished for disloyalty.

Florindo Aretusi arrives in Venice to look for his fiancée Beatrice Rasponi (disguised as her slain brother, Frederico). Rest assured that the servant they inadvertently share does his utmost to hamper the lovers' reunion.

If all this sounds confusing, ignore it and keep reading. That's the way it's supposed to be. Because this maze of multitudinous mix-ups is all part of the fun in Carlo Goldini's *The Servant of Two Masters*, currently playing at the Rice Theatre.

Goldoni, the 18th century Italian master of the situation comedy, was a great admirer of the French playwright, Moliere. *The Servant of Two Masters* demonstrates his influence to no small extent, and bears a particularly strong resemblance to *Tartuffe*.

Being light and witty, the play relies on a carefully sustained sense of controlled madness in order to succeed. Any lapse into heavy-handed melodrama or chaotic frenzy can lose the audience and ruin the play. While some of the cast handled their parts wonderfully, other performances came too close to that fragile border line.

One thing which did not help the situation is the Rice's theatre-in-the-round set-up. The richness of gesture and facial expression, which the actors try so hard to

transmit, is inevitably lost to any given side of the theatre at any single point in the action, deeming the play quite unsuitable for the Rice's circular staging.

Graeme Campbell's direction nevertheless works "around" this problem. With the aid of Tom Cone's new translation, Campbell tries to bring this classical, boisterous plot up to date, but never quite succeeds. There are a few ultra-modernisms which could have been omitted (Aretusi's rapturous "Ya-hoo," for example), and other scriptural interpretations which could have been used to achieve a more compatible blend of the old and the new. As it stands, the characters and their setting are somehow disjointed. It was difficult to relate to the play as anything more than spectators, although the script is so conducive to personal involvement.

Barry McGregor stands out with his razor-sharp humor. He presents his Truffaldino with glamor and wit, not to mention great timing. His portrayal of a wry and cunning servant is so well done that you can't imagine how the real thing could be any different. He is a natural and spontaneous soloist to an accompanying "chorus" which, with a few exceptions, lack that necessary believability.

Heather Summerhayes gave a solid performance as the goofy and artless Clarice. The role of Beatrice was played by Judith Mabey with grace and intelligence. Unfortunately, the rest of the roles were either over-done or under-done.

Richard McMillan as the ever-agitated Florindo, Janet Daverne as the excessively ebullient Smeraldina, and James De Felice as the posturing Pantalone play their parts with such theatrical affectation that at times this light, fresh play seems smothered in heavy syrup.

Yet *The Servant of Two Masters* is an entertaining play which detaches you from the outside world. For two hours you can forget about life's problems and relax in the fantasy of 18th century Venice.



Truffaldino (Barry MacGregor) the servant is caught at an inopportune moment between his two masters, Beatrice Rasponi (Judith Mabey) and Florindo Aretusi (Richard McMillan).

photo Ray Giguere

## Writer exalts English

*On Language*  
by William Safire  
Times Books 16.95

review by Alison Thomson

This book is a delightful temper tantrum by the irascible William Safire — this fellow gives even Fowler a run for his money.

Safire writes a column on English usage for the New York Times — a sort of intellectual version of the *Edmonton Journal's* "The Queen's English." This book is a selection of those columns.

Safire covers a range of questions on usage, style and elegance in writing, and has a large and devoted following who do not hesitate to write and let him know he has slipped up — his "shame on you" file.

From the nice distinction between alternate and alternative  
**WILLIAM SAFIRE**  
**ON LANGUAGE**



to the horrors of redundancy (past history, free gift), Safire casts a baleful eye and upholds the right.

Even the cause of anti-sexism is a subject for his cynical comment; he concludes that ridiculous it may be, but a journalist in these times calls a woman a girl at his own peril.

Politics don't more than creep in at the edges of Safire's copy; he's a Pulitzer-winning political journalist of, to put it kindly, extremely right-wing persuasion. More precisely, he is a Libertarian. Fortunately, where he confines himself to comment on English, this is no drawback, although he does seem to be more critical of Carter's southern verbal mannerisms than of Reagan's monstrosities. *De gustibus non disputandum est.*

He warns us of the infantilism "bla bla bla" used by those of us who have difficulty with the language of the ancients when we mean "etcetera," or "unfortunately, I didn't stop to think about what I wanted to say before I opened by mouth."

He points out that Hobson's choice was not that fared by Buridan's ass; if both references escape you, you'll have to read the book.

He disappoints in one place; he allows the use of "hopefully" for "I hope" or "it is to be hoped". And many, many readers rose up in protest. Just this once, William Safire, you are wrong.

The ridiculous use of the phrase "pro-life" meaning "anti-abortion" is yet another topic of Safire tirade; he understands clearly the propaganda use of such a phrasing, but deprecates the debasement of the language which results.

*On Language* is a fascinating look at English by one of that disappearing species, the person who cares about the correct and meaningful use of language to express one's thoughts.

And in the immortal words of Safire: "Proofread carefully to see if you any words out."

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## Grisman's quintet is dawg-gone good

review by Sue Jurczak

There is nothing like a dose of "Dawg" music to remedy the Sunday night blues. Thanks go out to the Edmonton Jazz Society for bringing the David Grisman Quintet back to the SUB Theatre

for two performances Sunday night.

A very relaxed crowd showed up to enjoy the Quintet's very unusual style of music.

David Grisman, now 35, has been playing the mandolin since

he was 16. Strictly bluegrass back then, Grisman was strongly influenced by the great mandolinist Bill Monroe. Educated at the University of New York, he played in a few eastern bands and became interested in experimental music. Later, he moved to California and did album back ups for such singers as Linda Ronstadt.

In 1976, he put together the David Grisman Quintet and has been going strong ever since. A prolific composer, Grisman has written several scores for movies (most notably *King of the Gypsies*) and has cut several albums. The group's brand of music defies categorization but can be best described as a blend of bluegrass, jazz, rock and classical known simply as "Dawg" (Grisman's nickname) music. The instruments are as interesting to look at as they are to listen to — all are traditional with the majority made before 1934.

The band's latest album 'Quintet '80' was featured at Sunday night's performance with the audience being treated to such selections as *Dawg Mutt*. The other members of the group are

all accomplished musicians in their own rights, and Grisman allowed each one to show off his individual talent.

Mike Marshal was featured first. This state fiddle champion from Florida usually plays second mandolin. He has, however, developed a new interest since we've seen his last — the mandocello (on this unusual instrument he played two of his original compositions — *Gaitor Strut* and a special tribute to John Lennon — both of which will be on his upcoming album.

Rob Wasserman, from Maroon County, California, is the bassist. He also writes music for the solo bass, and is also putting together an album, with Grisman as producer. He selected *Bass Space* to give the audience an idea of what the bass can do on its own.

Next came the Grand National Fiddle Champion of the United States and Calgary, Mark O'Connor. At 19, he is the Quintet's youngest member. He has been recording since the age of 12 and has currently put out an album entitled *On the Rampage*.



Three fifths of the David Grisman Quintet. From left to right: David Grisman, Rob Wasserman and Mark O'Connor.

photo Ray Giguere