

ARTS

Torontoized Moliere works surprisingly well

by Paul Gazzola

Jack Scapino!
written by Richard Binsley and Duncan McIntosh, from a play by Moliere

Jane Mallet Theatre

Moliere's 17th century comedy, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, has been modernized, Torontoized and Canadianized. It is now Theatre Plus Toronto's latest production, *Jack Scapino!*

And, you know what? It works. "Her eyes," gushes a lovestruck Ottavio (Tom McCamus), "sparkle like Honest Ed's in a summer rain." Moments later, the source of such inspiration, his beloved Gina (Chick Reid), enters, dressed as if she had just walked out of a heavy metal video.

Adapted by company member Richard Binsley and artistic director Duncan McIntosh, the local references blend smoothly into the play, causing no major disruptions in the story. (Binsley also plays the title character, while McIntosh is Carlo, the cafe owner.)

Having married against their fathers' wishes, Ottavio and Leandro (Patrick Galligan) turn to the roguish and persuasive Scapino to help iron things out. As with most farcical comedies, whatever can go wrong with Jack's schemes, does.



Gina (Chick Reid) and Scapino (Richard Binsley) share a moment in Theatre Plus Toronto's production of *Jack Scapino!*

One of the more ingenious changes to the play has Sylvestro (Jim Mezon), a friend of Scapino's, dressing up as a hockey player in order to scare Argante (Craig Davidson). Ottavio's father and Sylvestro's boss. The whole scene — Sylvestro entering to the theme of *Hockey Night in Canada*. The Hull training camp

jokes ("He can walk to Hull and back!") — is perfect.

It was the little touches, however, that made *Jack Scapino!* fun to watch. Things like Scapino shouting, "Stand up, Row G!" and

then being chased into the audience and through that row by Leandro, or, a link of sausages being used as nun-chucks.

Despite the fact that the play was staged with Binsley in mind

(having co-written it and playing the lead), the majority of the players perform with enthusiasm. The only exception is Kate Davis as Zerbinetta, Leandro's beloved, although her weak performance may be due to the fact that she was the last character introduced.

As for Binsley, the scene where he exacts revenge on Argante proved he deserved the lead. If you recall the Bugs Bunny cartoon where he hides Mugsy and Rocky in the stove, you'll have an idea of what this scene is like.

Jack Scapino! is not totally flawless. The ending was too abrupt, the second half seeming much shorter than the first. A more serious complaint that could be made is that the only females shown in the play, Gina and Zerbinetta, are both more than a bit ditzy, and mostly concerned with getting married.

Perhaps this part should also be updated.

Jack Scapino! will be playing until August 24 at the St. Lawrence Centre's Jane Mallet Theatre.

bohemia

a column
by Ira Nayman

Television's greatest asset is also one of its most problematic features: the franchise.

The franchise includes the cast of characters, their relationships and the premise which brings them together. The attraction is in its consistency; our favourite shows are as comfortable as our best pair of jeans. To keep audiences coming back, producers know that, no matter what happens, everything has to be the same at the end of the programme as it was in the beginning.

The problem with this way of telling stories is that it does not reflect reality: life is change, certain and constant. Moreover, it limits what can happen in your show. Finally, as if that weren't enough, it is the antithesis of the traditional dramatic form, where the main character learns something about her/himself in the course of the dramatic action.

There is an alternative: a single story told in several instalments over a period of weeks. This allows the characters, relationships and situations to change, and there are no guaranteed happy endings. Because they aren't usually epics shown over the course of a few successive nights, they aren't mini-series; I refer to them as "limited series."

Three excellent limited series have just or are about to come to an end: *Twin Peaks*, *Traffik* and *Pennies From Heaven*. They are all intelligent, adult programmes worth staying with over four to eight weeks; should they be repeated over the summer, as is likely, you should treat yourself to one.

It would take an entire column just to describe *Twin Peaks* (ABC), a soap opera/murder mystery/fantasy/farce. Although David Lynch's personal obsessions, particularly the one about corruption lurking beneath the veneer of innocence, are front and centre, the series is by turns hilarious and macabre, sad and unsettling.

(Of course, *Twin Peaks* has now become a series, and the final episode not only didn't resolve anything, but left more unanswered than a typical Question Period. Ah, well — trust David Lynch to completely destroy your expectations!)

Traffik (PBS, part of *Masterpiece Theatre*) interweaves three stories revolving around the heroin trade: a Pakistani poppy farmer whose field is burned ends up working for a major drug smuggler; a woman is forced to take over her husband's drug smuggling operation in Germany when her husband is arrested; and, a Home Office Secretary must deal with stopping the flow of drugs into Britain while dealing with his daughter's heroin addiction.

Boasting crisp writing, fine acting and unexpectedly good direction, *Traffik*'s main strength is its non-judgmental portrayal of all aspects of the drug trade. The show offers a bleak picture, but a remarkably realistic one.

Although not up to the standards of his masterpiece, *The Singing Detective*, Dennis Potter's *Pennies From Heaven* (PBS) is an alternately optimistic and depressing look at life. A British sheet music salesman during the Depression bounces between his frigid wife and a mistress, ruining all their lives.

The insertion of period song and dance routines into otherwise highly dramatically charged situations is brilliant, if occasionally overdone. But, the main reason to watch is Bob Hoskins' superlative performance as Arthur.

Limited series have many advantages. Because they are usually written by one person, with a constant technical crew, they are invariably more consistent than ordinary shows. The form also allows for greater character development and more complex relationships and stories.

Limited series require a greater effort on the part of viewers to follow from one week to the next. But, they are usually worth that effort.

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