

Kutztown's 'Miser' deserves honors

By JOHN FLAUTZ
Morning Call Reviewer

A major advantage of an area peppered with college drama departments is that at least once every season you can count on a Moliere revival. Kutztown State College has done the honors this time with a modest but neatly turned production of "The Miser." No doubt the 17th century understood matters of inherited money and its stressful effect on a family rather better than the tax-conscious 20th century does, but "The Miser" remains delightful entertainment.

Harpagon, an elderly Parisian with two grown but dependent children, is reputedly wealthy but so cheap that his servants wear torn breeches. He is quite willing to add to his fortunes by marrying off his daughter to another ancient grandee, and we discover that he makes his money by usurious moneylending.

All in all, our miser is an inferior specimen of humanity. However, when we find that everyone who

works for him is an idiot, that his daughter intends to marry his steward, and that his son Cleante is a hopeless twit in a candy-colored suit, we begin to see Harpagon's side of things. Joseph A. Ashcroft plays a rather winning Harpagon, not at all a grasping old beast but as tenderly in love with his money as the various young folk are in love with one another. If he would rather part with a child than a franc, we understand why.

Ashcroft mugs and tumbles his way through the part, and in general galvanizes the comedy. As will happen in a Moliere play, the other best roles also go to characters who keep things on the move.

Lori A. Bishop plays Frosine, called "an adventuress" in the program but really one of those ladies of family but no property who make themselves available to do odd jobs, for a consideration, in French plays. Ms. Bishop "does" her with the hauteur of a society widow reduced to selling real estate — only the most exclusive listings, of course. Mark I.

Branche plays Cleante's scheming servant with a Superfly hat and a cool grin. Moliere might have some trouble recognizing either, but he would certainly be tickled by them.

Mark Lacava's Cleante is rather upstaged by that costume — the costumes are by Gwen Walters, and they are excellent even though Cleante's looks radioactive. Theresa M. Angst is Harpagon's daughter, Elise, and she puts some sauce into a role that might have turned saccharine. Beth Appel has an even tougher part to play as a young woman unaccountably in love with drippy Cleante, but she convinces us that although the girl's will power could use a booster there is nothing wrong with her judgment.

John Tone plays the steward, a take-charge sort, with less gumption than the character probably deserves. Jeffery A. Kamm clowns through the role of a disgruntled servant, an interpretation in keeping with the light tone of the production

but again rather less than the character's due. R. Charles Rager, Yvonne B. Ward, Jonathan Bream, Joseph R. Gestl, John Danatzko, and Jeffery Brown round out the cast.

Scene designer R.E. Reinecke has turned the three-sided stage at KSU's Little Theatre into a stark courtyard, and director Annette Mazzaferri keeps the lighthearted mood going with brisk movement and rapid-fire lines. But someone, presumably the translator, has kept little scraps of French in the text so that actors pop out with "c'est moi," just like Miss Piggy.

Most people don't find economics funny. To be funny about it after 300 years requires genius. Even though Moliere thought that only the greediest loanshark would demand 18 percent (live and learn, Jean-Baptiste) he deserves the honors done him by Kutztown State's players. They deserve a few themselves. The play continues tonight through Saturday.

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