A Publication of the University of Dallas Drama Department
Welcome to another exciting edition of OnStage, the University of Dallas Drama Department’s bi-annual magazine. Inside we explore the wonderful French neoclassical world of Pierre Corneille’s The Liar seen through the irreverent eyes of David Ives, one of the most brilliant comedic playwrights working in the American theater. Our brilliant editor Alonna Ray has put together a range of articles and interviews delving into the process of guest artist David Denson who brought us this perfect UD play when we asked him to direct the spring Mainstage.

We have considered bringing in a guest director for a while in the department. We believe it is very important for our students and our faculty to experience new ways of creating theater. With Professor Kyle Lemieux on a much-deserved sabbatical, and my schedule filled with added departmental chair duties, this semester was a perfect opportunity to introduce the students to another director’s process. And we are very lucky David Denson agreed to come on board. Not only is he one of the most sought after directors in North Texas, he is also the Director of Programming for the AT&T Performing Arts Center. David’s connections to the local and national theatre scene will prove invaluable to our students as they make the transition to the professional world.

But David is not the only guest artist working with our students on this crazy farce. We have also brought in a brilliant fight choreographer, as well as a nationally recognized voice and speech coach. Jeff Colangelo has choreographed in the DFW area for theatre companies like the Undermain, Theatre Three, Shakespeare Dallas, Southern Methodist University, Cara Mia and the Dallas Theater Center. Our dialect coach, Jenni Steck, has worked extensively as a voice and speech coach for performers and professionals ranging from James Woods, Alexander Skarsgard and Alicia Silverstone to broadcasters on CNN, CBS, NBC Universal, Telemundo and ESPN.

OnStage helps us promote all the wonderful craziness going on in the Drama Department, from the Mainstage to the Senior Studios to the student-driven After Hours series. It is the brainchild of Professor Kyle Lemieux, and now I get to praise and thank him while he is not in the office. But OnStage would not happen without our editor, junior Alonna Ray. And we are incredibly grateful to our photographer, senior Simon Gonzales for three semesters of beautiful photography. Thank you Kyle, Alonna, and Simon for helping us share a deeper understanding of how theatre is created.

See you at the theater!

Stefan Novinski
Acting Chair of Department

Costume designs by Associate Professor Susan Cox are spread all throughout this magazine.
When I first sat down with director David Denson to discuss this semester’s Mainstage Production of Pierre Corneille’s The Liar translated and adapted by David Ives, he described it as “a much needed frivolity full of rebellion.” This witty, upbeat comedy takes place in 1643 Paris. It follows the escapades of Dorante, a young man who comes to Paris to escape the dull life of a country noble. The story progresses as he attempts to recreate himself and find love by telling spellbinding lies and extravagant stories.

The rebellion Denson spoke of is present in Dorante’s desperate efforts to establish his independence from his father and to dazzle the citizens of Paris, though this rebellion does not stop with plot. This production has been inspired by the many rebellions which have led to its fruition: from Corneille’s fight with the French Academy to the Fronde Rebellion, from the activism of the civil rights movement to the fantastic satire of the 1960’s entertainment industry, and finally, through a series of translation changes running from Alarcon to Corneille, and finally from Corneille to Ives.

Though the term “rebellion” often carries a negative connotation, it can also be incredibly productive. Rebellion brings about political change, fosters equality, and has provided a breeding ground for some of the most inspired comedians of history. Writing during the Fronde Rebellion (a rebellion of the French nobles against Louis XIV) in addition to the transition between the baroque and classical periods, Corneille found himself trying to create art in a tumultuous time. Under the leadership of Cardinal Richelieu, the French Academy of Literature was established in 1635 to regulate the French language, thus beginning the “age of classicism,” so called because it was rooted in and modeled after the poetics of ancient Greece. The Academy established a set of rules and parameters to govern French drama. One year after the establishment of these rules, Corneille produced The Cid, a tragicomedy which violated almost every one of them. The play was harshly criticized by the academy, but loved by crowds. In defense of his masterpiece, Corneille later stated, “Notre premier but doit être plaire,” (our first purpose must be to please). UD’s production aims to satisfy that artistic desire to please by bringing joy to the audience through laughter and the opportunity to view the world in a new perspective.

After establishing himself on the French theatrical scene with a series of seven successful tragedies, Corneille returned to his comedic roots with The Liar in the winter season of 1643. The story comes directly from a Spanish morality play called La Verdad Sospechosa (The Suspicious Truth) written in 1634 by Juan de Alarcon. Corneille kept the basic plot and characters and translated many full speeches from the original, yet he put his own spin on it. In the words of critic and scholar George May, Corneille sought to arouse “the emotion we feel when confronted with the extremes of human behavior.” Instead of maintaining the moral lessons from the original, Corneille aimed to use Dorante’s lies to produce a sense of wonder, of fundamental admiration, thus rebelling against the didactive nature of the original play which sought to condemn all lies.

Hundreds of years later, the story of this cavalier storyteller is twisted and toyed with once again in Ives’ new translation. While maintaining the basics—plot, characters, jokes—Ives
creates what he calls a “translaptation (i.e. a translation with a heavy dose of adaptation).” Ives’ vibrant verse adds anachronisms at every corner and fabricates a new level of wit and wordplay unattainable in a literal translation. He modernizes the show while maintaining its original integrity not only through his translation choices, but also by reassigning lines and throwing in nods to the audience. These changes heighten the relationship dynamics between the eccentric characters, and invite the viewers to feel as if they are participants in the zany antics on stage. In his own words, Ives states, “In the end, I did to The Liar what Corneille had done to his Spanish source: I ran with it.”

Inspired by the rebellion surrounding the play’s original debut as well as Ives’ radical approach to translation, the production team geared up early on to make this show as much fun as possible. While still set in 1643, the designers took Ives’ anachronistic lead and decided to throw in googly eyes, the Eiffel Tower, crayola-colored costumes, and countless props that stand out from the period-setting. The bright, cartoony aesthetic hearkens back to the classic comedy sketch shows of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Brechtian stage elements abound by breaking the fourth wall, reminding the audience at all times that they are watching a play. This reminder serves as a whimsical invitation to leave the troubles of the real world behind and to enter into the realm of laughter and entertainment.

Every element of this production is saturated in some form of rebellion. From its translation, to its designs, from its zany world, to its comedic genre the show is steeped in a whimsicality that simultaneously entertains and provokes introspection. We as Americans live in a politically charged moment: negativity and criticism pervade the media and there is an overwhelming desire for change and equality. There are marches, protests, and people voicing their dissatisfaction with the state of the world on every street corner. This climate of rebellion may not be as drastic as the Civil Rights Movement or the Fronde Rebellion, yet the cries for change bring about the need for entertainment. In moments like this, comedy thrives as a form of rebellion itself. We need the distraction from the difficulties of our lives, and the laughter of this show provides a refuge from the angst of our vociferous time, much as it did when it first premiered in 1643. In the words of Ives, we are here to present you with “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as refracted in a theatrical fun-house mirror. Welcome to The Liar.”

Top left: Samuel Pate’s Dorante sneak a lie past Sandy Twetten’s Lucrece. Middle: Zeina Masri as Isabelle and Hope Gniewek as Clarice watch. Bottom: The three talk it over. Opposite: Sandy Twetten as Lucrece and Tony Spurgin as Geronte.
While comedy is generally associated with banana peels and bodily humor, it also includes the wry wordplay of Corneille’s *The Liar* or Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, works which do not seem to fit this comedic stereotype. Why do both elicit laughter? To what human needs does such comedy speak? Associate Professor of English Andrew Moran, Assistant Professor of French and French Program Director Jason Lewallen, and Associate Dean of Constantin College and Professor of English Scott Crider, all shared their thoughts on the nature of comedy and how the genre has been received by popular and scholarly audiences.

Drawing upon his knowledge of French history to uncover Corneille’s messages in the context of French comedy, Lewallen stated, “Comedy is often used as a way of unmasking false pretentions.” Often this “unmasking,” Lewallen explained, was aimed at the Church. The split between clerical and anticlerical had been rife in France for centuries, coloring its comedies.

Politically, Lewallen said that the monarchy was taking greater control over the rules of dramatic production. “If people like Corneille wrote plays that were not considered in good taste according to the ideals of the period, he would not necessarily be censored, but there would be scandals and debates over what he had done,” Lewallen said.

Moran analyzed a different rule of comedic storytelling: the mode itself.

“Comedy tends to be episodic, as opposed to that unity of action that Aristotle demands of serious drama and tragedy,” Moran said. Taking Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as a prime example of fine episodic comedy, Moran noted the liberty that arises from such flexibility and diversity.

“You can mix things together, you can jump from one thing to another,” Moran said. “You can have a song and dance number, you can have a little bit of romance, you can have someone slipping on a banana peel, and you can have a serious tender moment and then go back to the yucks, and then the tension, and then the happy ending.”

Though Aristotle regards tragedy as the highest genre in his *Poetics*, Moran pointed out that even Aristotle noted that tragedy suffers from such mixing. Whereas comedy can have a wonderful diversity of characters and conflicts, tragedy requires a more precise focus upon one serious human action. “Comedy allows that mixing, a sort of freedom to represent the variety of things and a freedom of inventiveness,” Moran said. “Comedy is the genre of freedom.”
Crider pointed out that this comedic liberty more accurately represents human nature: “Tragedy is thought of as higher than comedy because tragedy concerns the noble, and comedy the ignoble,” he said. “But I think that is a mistake. Much of the best literature since Shakespeare follows him in mixing the tragic and the comic to represent human beings as both.”

Despite such freedom, comedy is not without its fetters. The Liar presents a significant challenge in its translation. David Ives translated The Liar in 2010, but Corneille’s original was first published in French in 1643. Much of the comedy in the French language resides in its unpredictability. Lewallen stated that “French comic writers often like to exploit the zones of undecidability, or perhaps even exaggerate them.” In his translation, Ives has replicated this technique by forging his own version rather than aiming for a direct translation. Because Ives relies so much upon wordplay—as Corneille did—he is constantly toying with the audience’s perceptions.

“It motivates a philosophical approach to language that emphasizes the difficulty of communicating and the difficulty of interpreting what someone is saying,” Lewallen said.

Reconciling such deeper philosophical truths with comedy’s “lower” aspects, Crider, Moran and Lewallen all acknowledged that comedy responds to a basic human need through the laughter it inspires.

“Low comedy is the genre that represents our ridiculousness—especially the ridiculousness of the body—and high comedy, that ridiculousness’s transformation into flourishing,” Crider said. “We laugh at the ridiculousness and rejoice in the transformation.”

Lewallen said that comedy also serves to alleviate the weight of such difficult elements of human existence as mortality and suffering. “When we think about that, it is interesting to ask whether the division between comedy and tragedy is really set in stone,” he said. “If one of the aims of comedy is to help us to cope with the tragic elements of life, then it seems that the relationship to tragedy is an important one, and that the boundary between tragedy and comedy might not be impenetrable. It might be porous.”

Moran similarly questioned the divide between tragedy and comedy that has been assumed for millennia. Arguing against the bias toward tragedy that can often be found among Western critics, Moran called upon students to analyze the most humorous aspects of comic works. More often than not, the playwright has a deeper underlying purpose.

“When the best authors, especially Medieval and Renaissance authors such as Chaucer, Rabelais, Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson, are at their funniest, they’re often at their most profound,” Moran said.

Crider agreed. “Whether a sitcom, a stand up comic, or a romantic comedy, I admire the discipline required to let the action be comic without signaling that it is so,” Crider said. “Then, the laughter arises from the action; it is earned.”

Condensed into its purest form, what is comedy?

“Comic timing, but also common experiences,” said Lewallen.

“Comedy is the art of making people laugh.”

“To quote Justice Potter Stewart, ‘I know it when I see it,’” Moran said.

University of Dallas audiences will be able to see it for themselves at the Margaret Jonsson Theater this spring.
Clockwise from top left: Director David Denson; Samuel Pate’s Dorante picks up on the two-finger pointing as he works out a lie; Assistant Director Mary Armato works with the maids, played by Maria Rossini, Madeleine Bishop, Matteo Cina, Bernadette Roden, and Meg Boyd; Tony Spurgin as Geronte, Dorante’s father, who dreams of having grandchildren.
An Interview with the Director: Introducing David Denson

by Alonna Ray

This semester, the Mainstage Production was directed by guest Director David Denson. Denson is currently the associate director of programming at the AT&T Performing Arts Center in the Dallas Arts District. He has worked in the performing arts industry for over twenty years and is responsible for curating subscription programs at the Center such as the “Off Broadway on Flora” series, which brings Broadway musicals to Dallas, and the “Elevator Project” series, which features small performing arts groups in the area.

AR: What made you decide to direct this play?

DD: When Kyle [Lemieux] approached me, he sent me a list of the production history of the department. I combed through it looking for the gaps, and there wasn’t a lot of comedy on that list. So that was the goal: to find a comedy. Because I understand the focus on classics here and the focus on language, it made sense to be looking for farces and I really wanted something with a modern adaptation. I had read something about this adaptation from Ives, and when I found it I thought, “This one is really funny.”

AR: What is it like being a guest director here at this school?

DD: There are multiple levels of answers to that. It’s like being a director anywhere anytime, in the sense that your job as a director is to get the entire team on the same page and then get them to a performance level result. On the other hand, I’m dealing with students who are coming from various experience levels, so you’re trying to get everybody on the same level. [Another] one of the challenges here is that, at least in my experience, the students were kind of tight. They were a little bit conservative in how comfortable they felt opening up, expanding, looking silly, making mistakes. The play is wacky and that kind of silliness has to be born naturally in a moment together through an impulse.

AR: What are some of the ways that you try to bring out the wackiness and the silliness? How do you create an environment for that?

DD: We’ve done a lot of improv to build camaraderie, to build trust, and to build a sense that this is a team—you can depend on them, and they will take care of you no matter what. On the other hand too, I try to make it a point every day to come in and screw up in front of them—to make a mistake and to have to come back and try again. If I can screw up and we can laugh about it, then they can too. I think that plays are built out of happy mistakes.

AR: What are some of the big themes of the play that really captured your attention?

DD: We live in a very political moment. I’m married to a political activist, so our political life is always on the front of my mind. When I read the title of the play, just the title, I was immediately drawn to it because I thought it would be a great opportunity to make fun of—well someone I am opposed to. Now when I actually read the play, I realized it is absolutely not about that in any way. But the nature of this play is that it’s about forming your own destiny. That became really attractive to me.

AR: Do you see any threads of rebellion in the show?

DD: I love the idea that when the world is in turmoil, there’s a way to respond to authority using humor. There’s this impulse with some people, when you’re in difficult times, to literally play opposite to them. Comedy is a rebellious act. It’s a way that you can unify people and then insert a subversive idea. That’s the kind of rebellion I like—we’re distracting [the audience] with candy on one side and then coming from the other side with a thought that may stick with them.

AR: What is it like working with students as opposed to professionals?

DD: In the professional world, you’re either hitting your marks or you’re not. And if you’re not, you’re fired. In the student
world, regardless of where you are, our work is always just to get you farther along. I’m not really directing a play, I’m teaching a class. So I’m very conscious of what I can add to the knowledge base of these kids that helps move the ball forward for them. The real meat of the experience for everyone is there in the rehearsal. So I try to develop that rehearsal in a way that they are able to learn through it.

AR: Talk to me about the decision to set it in period, but have it influenced by so much anachronism.

DD: My natural inclination when we do plays like this is to keep them where they should be. At the same time, we’re a modern audience with a modern sensibility, and a lot has happened between 1643 and 2017. Because it’s a comedy especially, it gives us an opportunity for more anachronistic elements than others. There’s a sense that if you can dream it up, it can be a reality. And that idea really rang true for me in terms of The Liar—Dorante’s lies are so effective to the people he’s lying to—he dreams up entire scenarios that everyone buys into. That idea matched with the idea of Corneille as a rebel pushing back against establishment and establishment rules.

AR: What has been your favorite part about this process?

DD: My favorite part about this process is watching everybody start to fall into rhythm with each other. You have all these individuals come into the room with all their different rhythms and you just gradually see the room start to line up with each other, start to be in sync. Watching that happen is an amazing experience.

**LYING** is the art of making someone believe that something is true when in reality it isn’t...kind of like theater. Watch the maids!

**PIERRE CORNEILLE** (1606-1684) was a French poet and dramatist who revived French theater. At first, Cardinal de Richelieu was impressed by Corneille’s genius, and invited him to join the exclusive “Society of Five Authors.” But Corneille kept **BREAKING ALL THE RULES** of Classical drama, which caused friction with Richelieu and the French Academy. Corneille’s most recognized work, titled **THE CID,** was published in 1637. It was highly controversial, but changed theater forever.

**DAVID IVES** is an American playwright, novelist, and screenwriter who has been creating breathtaking comedy since the 1970's. One of his most known works is a collection of short comedies called **All In the Timing.** His plays typically include hilarious **SLAPSTICK COMEDY** and wordplay which emphasize the difficulties of communication. This style rings true in his 2010 translation of Corneille’s **THE LIAR.**

**BERTOLT BRECHT** (1898-1956) was a German playwright, poet, and director. He developed the idea of **EPIC THEATER.** This is the theory that the audience should be alienated from the play so that they can think objectively about it and not simply respond with their emotions. That way, they can use their reason to reflect on the moral problems in the play that mirror their own world. Things like **TWO-DIMENSIONAL PROPS** help achieve this, because they remind you that you’re just watching a play and that this isn’t real life.

**CARTOONS** provide an over-simplified version of reality. In keeping with Aristotle, the details aren’t as important as the plot. So it doesn’t matter if your character has three fingers or suddenly pulls an anvil out of his pocket, the plot moves forward, which is what we care about. Things like a **bold and simplified COLOR SCHEME** help you quickly separate characters in your mind.

**ANACHRONISMS** help to reinforce both the alienation of Epic Theater and the simplification and familiarity of cartoons. The anachronistic Eiffel Tower backdrop tells you we’re in France, even if it technically wasn’t built until 1887. These misplaced elements also help **BRIDGE THE DIVIDE** between periods; for example, The 1630’s, the 1960’s, and 2017.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SUSAN COX (COSTUME DESIGN) and Affiliate Assistant Professor Will Turbyne (set design) discuss the slapstick humor and great fun involved in designing the elements of The Liar.

KT: What struck you in your initial encounter with the play?

WT: I remember how funny [the play] is. David Ives describes it as a “translaptation” which is more than a translation, he’s actually adapting it and contemporizing it and I think a lot of the humor just seems more accessible and more contemporary.

SC: My first reaction was: this is funny! That kind of sitcom stuff is not usually my favorite but this is simply a funny play.

KT: How would you describe the play’s humor and how is that humor present in what you’ve created?

SC: Well, I think of this as kind of sitcom-y, slapstick, sort of French farce, all rolled into one. I think what David is going for is the sense that somebody could be hit with an anvil and spring back up. It’s that kind of impossible, almost violent slapstick. I’m looking for sort of hidden jokes. First of all, all the clothes are way “cartooned” and not really 1640s. They’re not really period, they’re cartoon period.

KT: How have you adapted the historical styles of décor and clothing for this play?

WT: We’re going for a traditional theatrical look but even though the story is set in 1640, it’s a more contemporary setting because it does have an homage to the Loony Tunes cartoons and the western notion of sitcom humor as the play has been written and updated. The play takes place in Paris and the backdrop includes the Eiffel Tower which of course was not there in 1640’s, so we’re kind of playing with that. Some of the set pieces will be very anachronistic and out of time you know, a payphone, perhaps a fire hydrant, that sort of thing.

SC: And those [anachronisms] are certainly true of the clothes too. There will be people wearing Ray Bans, and there will be people wearing Goth wigs, and the hair colors coordinate with the clothes. There will be Crayola pink hair and Crayola red hair, and Crayola blue.

KT: How has it been working with David Denson as director?

SC: I’ve enjoyed the hell out of it! He’s hilarious, he’s funny, he’s smart, and I think he has great ideas. I think he’s interested in our ideas, and he’s not afraid—he’s a very courageous guy.

WT: This is my fifth year, we certainly haven’t done anything quite like this in the Margaret Jonsson Theater. This is certainly not a style of design that I regularly work in; this is a lot more cartoony fun. It’s been exciting, and it’s been fun being pushed in that direction by David and his choices.

KT: How is it working in a theater like the Margaret Jonsson Theater?

WT: In this space, more people see the show from the sides than from straight on. When you’re dealing with two dimensional scenery, you can play with that and the French did play with it a lot in the 1600’s. We’re embracing that [two-dimensionality] and saying hey, this is a play about lies and truth so we’re not going to hide anything from you. You’re going to see all the tricks. And it’s still going to be funny and it’s still going to be entertaining. I think there’ll be sort of an honesty to it; we’re hoping there’ll be an honesty to the comedy.
SC: They’ll see the lie.

KT: How have your initial conceptions of the designs changed?

SC: We started talking about it in November, and we’ve gone through an evolution with David—there have been lots of turnovers.

WT: Which is not at all uncommon in a design process. Design processes between designers and directors should really be a conversation that goes back and forth where different ideas lead to different thoughts. The spirit of that original idea is what we’re going for.

KT: What has been the most enjoyable part of working on this play?

SC: Honestly for me, it’s been the journey to here. It’s been so fun and stimulating—I always enjoy Will’s company and I really have enjoyed David’s company and the process he’s led. And now, I’ve enjoyed the kids in the shop and how excited they are about making it. Building this thing is going to be a blast too because of the students and because of the participation, and I always love that.

WT: The creative process is fun and what makes it particularly fun in theater is that it’s so much more collaborative than a lot of other processes. You’ve got a director, you’ve got a costume designer, we’ve got a UD graduate, Evyan Melendez who is going to be our sound designer, and you’ve got other students that are assisting as assistant designers. It’s just fun to get different ideas working in concert with one another on this whole process.

Costume designs by Associate Professor Susan Cox for Clarice and Lucrece. Costume designs are throughout the magazine.

Opposite: A stage model made by Assistant Professor Will Turbyne shows what the final stage will look like, complete with a cartoon-inspired proscenium arch. Above: Students work on the set in the MJT. A close up view of the two dimensional set pieces. Mary Bond and Jacob Heimlich are busy in the scene shop.
ON A CHEERFUL SUNDAY AFTERNOON, I sat down outside the Capp Bar with Samuel Pate, Hope Gniewek, Noah Kersting, and Sandra Twetten, curious to hear the inside scoop on the process of creating this semester’s mainstage, The Liar. These four leads discussed their wild ride working with guest director, David Denson, in a farcical 17th century French comedy adapted by a great contemporary playwright, David Ives. We spent the hour discussing how comedy, slapstick, speaking in rhyme, and the larger-than-life vision of this fantastical show will bring a fresh kind of entertainment to the UD campus.

MD: What was your first impression of the show and how has it changed?

ST: Every time there is a read through I find myself cracking up. I thought it was kind of a light play in the beginning but the depth of this show has just wowed me. With every rehearsal we find more and more, and we’re still digging.

NK: It reminds me of the Mel Brooks movies and the Marx Brothers movies. I think David Ives took a hilarious plot and modernized it in the best of ways. [He] made room for so much physical comedy and I think the script itself is hilarious. It’s Robin Williams-esque.

SP: Of the plays I’ve read there are few that have had me laughing as if I was watching a hilarious play and this is one of them. I was taken by the depth of color and the textures of the different characters and how distinct and unique they were and powerful and dynamic in their own ways. What has surprised me since starting is how much space there is inside the text to explore and bring things out that aren’t actually in the words of the text.

HG: There are so many twists and turns in this play I was getting dizzy. Every moment is fun and every moment you get to live in this fairytale world. The text is very rich. Corneille is a great playwright, David Ives is a great adaptor, and the text gives you so much to work with and so much to read into.

MD: What makes a gag funny?

HG: The first thing is timing. It’s allowing the audience get the close of a joke, to process it, to laugh, to feel comfortable and then move on. There’s so many components that go into it but I think the most important one is timing.

NK: A lot of the jokes and the gags are about Dorante trying to be a suave secret-agent-cowboy-superman and everything works out but not the way he planned it to.

SP: The intentions of the characters are what bring out the comedy. What I’ve come to learn is that you can’t try to be funny. If you try to be funny, you’re no longer doing an actor’s job. What’s funny is understanding that the comedy is there because it’s already been put in the story and in the characters. So your job is to do the characters and the story justice—and it’s funny because it’s human, or it’s strange and not quite human. It’s got to be an honest portrayal of the character and the comedy’s a product of that. If the comedy’s the intention and the character’s the by-product then you’ve got it backwards.

MD: What is the biggest personal challenge in doing this
sort of comedy?

SP: The technical demands of the show and how specific and deliberate you need to be in your actions and decisions—as fast as the characters are, the actors need to be twice as fast. There’s a big fight scene in the middle of the show with my character and Ed’s character, Alcippe. The specificity of those movements is critical. It’s drilling. It’s like a sport in that sense.

HG: Kyle Lemieux once told me that at UD, theater is a varsity sport. The hardest thing for me is the ability to be vulnerable on stage, because the stakes can get very high.

ST: For me, it’s finding the differences between me and my character.

MD: What is it like working with a guest director? How is this a different experience?

SP: Because college is so immersive, it’s always a good reminder that there’s a world out there beyond the campus that one day we’re going to be in. For any of us in the cast who are thinking of acting professionally after college, this gives an idea of what’s going to be different. This is not just fun. It is work.

ST: He’s so incredible and so good at what he does. It’s always fun to work with a new director and I love seeing the difference between his, Stefan’s, and Kyle’s ways of doing things. He never wants us to hold back and I love that.

NK: I just feel so free and encouraged by David. He’s used to directing shows in three weeks whereas we have nine weeks. He has even more time to do well and show us how it’s done, and I love the professionals he’s brought in.

MD: How do you fight being cliché?

ST: I walked into this play thinking I was typecast and that I’m going to play the quirky best friend. I had to throw all [that] out the window. Every single character has their onions, to quote Shrek, and I’m still getting to know Lucrece—she has so many layers.

SP: If there’s a stereotype it’s there for a reason. I think there’s often a negative attitude towards stereotypes and there’s a reason for that. But I think fundamentally human beings need [them]. It’s how we recognize things and process things in real time. The healthy stereotypes you don’t want to fight because they’re there for a reason. And clichés are funny sometimes!

MD: Finally, what advice do you have for people going to see The Liar?

ST: Everyone’s going to have a different reaction. Take it as it is.

SP: Be ready to be open and let it affect you. Let it sit with you.

HG: It’s a very human thing. Let it be a fairytale, a different world you step into. Enjoy it ♦

Opposite: Samuel Pate and Ed Houser practice a duel. Below: Zeina Masri’s Isabelle, Hope Gniewek’s Clarice and Sandy Twetten’s Lucrece watch as Samuel Pate’s Dorante gets a lecture from his father, Tony Spurgin’s Geronte.
THE CAST OF THE LIAR

MADELEINE BISHOP
MAID
FRESHMAN
UNDEN CRED

PAUL BOND
PHILISTE
FRESHMAN
DRAMA

MEG BOYD
MAID
SENIOR
PSYCHOLOGY

MATTEO CINA
MAID
JUNIOR
HISTORY

HOPE GNEI WECK
CLARICE
JUNIOR
DRAMA

ED Houser
ALCIPPE
SENIOR
ENGLISH

NOAH KERSTING
CLITON
JUNIOR
DRAMA & GERMAN

ZEINA MASRI
ISABELLE
SENIOR
DRAMA

SAMUEL PATE
DURANTE
JUNIOR
DRAMA

BERNADETTE RODEN
MAID
FRESHMAN
DRAMA

MARIA ROSSINI
MAID
FRESHMAN
ENGLISH

ANTHONY SPURGIN
GERONTE
JUNIOR
DRAMA

SANDY TWETTEN
LUCRECE
SOPHOMORE
DRAMA

QUEL RODRIGUEZ
ASSISTANT
STAGE MANAGER

ALESSANDRA JONES
ASSISTANT
STAGE MANAGER

MARY ARMATO
ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR

ELIZABETH HERRERA
STAGE MANAGER

DAVID DENSON
DIRECTOR

“NOTRE PREMIER BUT DOIT D’ETRE PLAIRE.”
“Our First Purpose must be to Please”
—Pierre Corneille

AND STAGE MANAGEMENT!
THE DUMB WAITER

Written by Harold Pinter
Directed by Jacob Heimlich

This tense psychological black comedy by the British playwright Harold Pinter follows two hit men, Ben and Gus, who have been tasked with waiting in an abandoned basement for their next target. They don’t know who the target is or when the target will arrive. While they wait, they discuss everything from fine china, to what it means to be a hitman. However, when the dumb waiter in the back of the basement starts randomly sending down food orders, they realize not everything is what it seems.

HELLO OUT THERE

Written by William Saroyan
Directed by Ellie Dimitry

Hello Out There is a dark small town drama in which a young charismatic gambler is imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit and the only person to hear his cries for justice is the young jail’s cook, Emily Smith. But he soon realizes that the only way to save himself is to convince Emily to break free from her meaningless small town existence. This delicate drama, by award winning Armenian-American William Saroyan, explores loneliness and what it means to be truly alive.

PURGATORIO

Written by Ariel Dorfman
Directed by Zeina Masri

In this searing human drama, a husband and wife are trapped in a mysterious afterlife where their only chance at salvation is to forgive their worst earthly enemies — each other. The two characters, who bear striking resemblances to the murderous Medea and the adulterous Jason of Euripides’ great tragedy, are pitted against each other in an intense battle of wills in which they confront their past and the horrific crimes they have committed against each other. The question they both must face is this: are there some sins that cannot be forgiven?

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The Liar
Translated & Adapted by David Ives

March 29 - April 8
Margaret Jonsson Theater