

Review of "The Imaginary Invalid"
By Julie McHale of the Waukesha Freeman

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Moliere's last comedy, "The Imaginary Invalid," opened in 1673. Ironically, this satiric play about a hypochondriac and the phony doctors that catered to his affliction was the last play Moliere starred in. He collapsed during the fourth performance and died shortly thereafter. Carroll University has unearthed this classic story and shortened it from three acts to an eighty-minute drama. The edited version goes swiftly by, engaging us every inch of the way.

Argan, the pitiful posturer who is more enamored with his chamber pot than his family, moans his way through life, looking for attention, affection and the latest cure. Daniel Polaski is perfect for the role. The people who surround him by choice or necessity include his maid Toinette, sassily rendered by Katelynne Rosera; his dotting but money-hungry wife Beline, played by Lauren Morrison; his devoted, lovesick daughter Angelique, nicely portrayed by Mariah Smith; and his sensible brother Beralde, credibly created by Justin Almquist.

Besides the constant ministrations to the ailing Argan, several other plots lurk beneath the surface. Angelique has fallen in love with Clemante, but Argan wants her to marry his doctor's son, Thomas Lillcrap, so he can always be surrounded by doctors. Thomas is a stammering nerd, and Daniel Slattery is a stand-out in his role as this doddering fool. His father, Dr. Lillcrap, played by Brandon Koster, though humorous at times, overuses volume as his main ploy for getting a laugh.

Meanwhile Argan's sweet, cooing little wife Beline, is scheming to get her husband's inheritance, and Angelique is about to be sent to a nunnery when she refuses to marry the blathering idiot Thomas. How everything works out in the end is quite cleverly manipulated through the ingenuity of Toinette (the maids are often the smartest characters) and brother Beralde.

The farcical elements probably could have been emphasized more, and the characterizations of Beline and Cleante (Devin Brockert) should have been more exaggerated. But the wonderful costumes, designed by Stephanie Brownell, added to the heightened flavor that Moliere so loved.

The play ended with a clever twist, taking some liberties with the original story, but I think the playwright would have approved. It just extended his intent to mock the medical profession and all the chicanery it can represent.

Bravo to Director James Zager and all the students and staff who collaborated on this theatrical offering. It captured the iconic humor of one of the many plays written to please and amuse King Louis XIV and many others to follow in the ensuing centuries.