

## 'Don Juan' poses a tempting question

Why would a man seduce a woman, and then immediately turn around and seduce a second woman? French playwright Moliere takes up the question with a vengeance in his fascinating stage piece "Don Juan."



**John  
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Stanford Summer Theater is now running a thoughtful, well-staged and admission-free student production of the play at Pigott Theater on the Stanford campus. This is definitely the theater bargain of the week.

In "Don Juan" the hero's philosophy is why tie yourself down to one beautiful woman when there are so many of them coming down the road, whom you will also want to sleep with. The play, in fact, opens with his latest betrayed female victim exploding on him in rage, as he prepares to target someone new.

The show, then, is a debate on moral issues. Is Don Juan free to do as he chooses? Or does he have responsibility to other people? Don Juan believes that his duty in life is to enjoy himself as he pleases.

Money and class frame this story. Don Juan closes his seduction deals with women by offering the wealth and status that go along with marriage to a nobleman.

He gets married once a month and has been married dozens of times. So the play generates some of its rage from challenging the institution of marriage.

Religious hypocrisy also comes in for a serious drubbing. Interestingly, a twist

at the play's end expresses the existence of a higher power.

Moliere seems to challenge his audience to find a spiritual connection despite the hypocritical masquerades of explicitly religious people.

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ater production uses an attractive period set and costumes, director Ed Sylvanus Iskandar has giving the show a zany, silent film-like chase staging, with a nod to Chaplin.

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For this show, the actors had a 10-week rehearsal period, longer than the more common three- to five-week norm, and the difference shows. Raffi Barsoumian captures the mercurial, sociopathic charm of lady-killer Don Juan, a character who, in the end, refuses to apologize, even if it kills him.

Nick Allen plays the emotionally sensitive yin to Don Juan's coldly intellectual yang, as his quick-witted servant Sganarelle. Will Brill has amusing moments as low-brain power Pierrot, a country bumpkin with a romantic crush on the more intelligent wench Charlotte (Chiara Motley).

Charlotte, however, soon becomes a Don Juan target in an amusing and coy seduction scene. When a rival firecracker wench (Sarah Moser, with a twisted Appalachian accent) comes along, the two women catfight. Moser is also strong

in a second role as a wildly indignant abandoned wife. Fabrice Palumbo-Liu is terrific as a poor man who refuses to blaspheme in exchange for money. He doubles later in another strong scene as Don Juan's disappointed father, making a powerful

argument that the good fortune of his son's birth comes with a responsibility to live up to standards of the ancestors.

In the end, after all this turmoil, "Don Juan" basically thumbs its nose at religious and social hypocrisy, but leaves open the door for a personal connection to a spiritual higher power. The issues are as meaningful for 2006 as they were in 1665.

Moliere stepped on a lot of toes with this show, and his "Don Juan" moral debate didn't last for long. Establishment outrage in Paris shut down the play after a mere 15 performances.

Rating: ★ ★ ★

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### At a glance

**What:** Stanford Summer Theater production of "Don Juan"

**When:** Through Aug. 27

**Where:** Pigott Theater, Stanford campus

**Admission:** Pay what you can