



Scapin

Reviewed by Michael Lazan

Presented by New York Classical Theatre, casting by Stephanie Klapper, in Central Park near West 103rd Street and Central Park West, Aug. 2–28.

It's quite difficult to perform outdoor summer theatre as well as New York Classical Theatre does in "Scapin," now being energetically presented in and around various knolls in northern Central Park.

From its self-referential nature to its winks at pop culture to its closing rendition of "Hava Nagila" (this is the only "Scapin" whose closing line is "Mazel tov"), **Bill Irwin** and **Mark O'Donnell** have completely remodeled Molière's comedy about a pair of servants (Scapin and Sylvestre) who trick their masters (Argante and Geronte) into allowing their sons (Octave and Leander) to marry.

Don't bristle at the outrageousness of this gut renovation. Unlike many a puerile attempt to rework a classic, Irwin and O'Donnell have turned this "Scapin" into a clean, smart, fast-moving piece that is extremely funny. When Molière's original demands outrageous coincidence or talky backstory, Irwin and O'Donnell smoothly turn the problem into a joke (there is a sign that says "Exposition" during the opening scene). The script is also easy to understand, to the point where children in the large crowd were comprehending and giggling. For sure, this is not the sort of outdoor theatre where much of the audience sits stiffly, feigning involvement.

As the cast races between previously designated spots in the park, the audience runs along, sometimes breathless. Once they sit, they are instantly involved by director **Stephen Burdman**'s loose, focused, and energetic cast. **Grant Neale** is a superb Scapin, vivid, very big, and real enough to sustain the action. As Sylvestre, **Erik Gratton** is equally delightful. Of the rest, especially notable are **Johnny Sparks**' wonderfully manic Octave, **William Greville**'s spot-on Argante, and **Michael Marion**'s smartly broad Geronte.

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