

LA STAGE WATCH

DON SHIRLEY

Sometimes a modern translation/adaptation can make an old play sound like a classic, even if we might not feel that way if we were to see the original in a less inspired “[translaptation](#)” — which is the word David Ives uses for his version of [Corneille’s](#) *The Liar*, now being produced by [Antaeus](#).

Actually, Ives’ translaptation had an advantage over presumably more faithful translations such as Marcus’ version of *The Guardsman*. Corneille’s original *Le menteur* was in verse, and Ives’ decision to honor that by using English-language couplets, in iambic pentameter, more or less forced him to come up with a lot more clever wordplay, with a much more contemporary sound, than you hear from Marcus’ translation of *The Guardsman*.



Nicholas D'Agosto, Kate Maher and Gigi Bermingham in “The Liar.” Photo by Geoffrey Wade.

And so *The Liar* glitters as it goes through its paces in Casey Stangl’s staging. Or it least it does with the cast that I saw, which was a Friday-night mixture of the two basic casts that perform on Saturdays and Sundays.

Of the four “deception” plays that I saw this weekend, *The Liar* is not only the oldest by far (1643), but it goes the farthest in glorifying the notion of elaborate lying as an exercise of imaginative vision. The central character Dorante (Graham Hamilton, in the cast I saw) is a

handsome, brilliant, confident and successful version of the “[pathological liar](#)” that Jon Lovitz used to play on *Saturday Night Live*. He just can’t stop the tales that whirl out of his mouth, without any respect at all for their veracity.

When this guy claims an exemplary military record, it’s much more convincing than anything Molnár’s *Guardsman* might say. And, also in comparison to *The Guardsman*, the play is helped immensely by the variety of other characters who surround Dorante — from his gullible servant (Brian Slaten) to the contrasting young women (Kate Maher and Ann Noble) whose names Dorante mixes up, to the two contrasting servants (played by one actress — Karen Malina White in the cast I saw). Actually, with the confusion of names and servants, you begin to see that Camoletti, in *Don’t Dress for Dinner* (see the segment of the column two shows above), called on a French comic tradition that goes back more than three centuries.

You may not remember the plot very well a few days after you see *The Liar*, but you’ll remember the exuberance of Dorante and his deceptions, and you’ll laugh.