



Tartuffe: The Rhinestone Hypocrite - Woodson High School

Religion is never an easy subject for a high school play. It's a subject prone to hurting many, dividing rather than bringing together. However, Carter G. Woodson High School's hilarious production of *Tartuffe: A Rhinestone Hypocrite* was the perfect balance of knock-off-your-socks comedy and serious discussion on the corrupting influence of greed over religious institutions.

Religion is such a difficult subject to portray that the original play was banned after its first performance in 1664. The play was banned for showing pious people as being corrupted by greed. Specifically, a man named Tartuffe exploits a wealthy man named Orgon by pretending to be a holy and devout man, while his family tries to free him from Tartuffe's evil influence. This version of the play is being premiered for the first time, written and directed by Christopher Rushing. The centuries-old play is updated for a modern audience, referencing cultural moments and taking place in a Texas Megachurch, while still incorporating most of the same characters as the original.

The production's greatest strength was the incredible physical acting. Orgon, wealthy man and Senator-hopeful, is played by Silas Blocker who put on a masterclass in physical comedy. Whether it's a stiff yet expressive hunched-over walk or his Caricature-esque facial expression work, his over-the-top movements helped clear up the show's satirical message hidden behind a barrage of his well-executed jokes. And while Silas is a great example, he's definitely not the only one. Tartuffe, the snake oil preacher, played by Aiden Brennan, contrasts with Orgon's stiffness by walking with a slimy consistency, revealing his wickedness and complementing the rest of the family nicely. Orgon's wife Elmire, played by Juliana Gurrola, played the demanding role of Tartuffe and Orgon's comedic foil was excellent even in uncomfortable situations, such as Tartuffe's romantic advances. These three formed the performance backbone for the show with their excellent physical comedy, making it a rottin-tootin good time.

The smaller characters matched the energy of these three, creating hilarious over-the-top moments. The love story between Mariane and Valere, played by Zoe Suruma and Graham Bickford, respectively, featured some hilarious and almost childlike moments, making not only the individual jokes funny but also the overall idea of them being separated because of Mariane's father seem very ridiculous, successfully advancing the

story's message. Hollee Roller and Blade Roller, played by Brooke Maylett and Makayla Santos, had the intense physical job of spending the entire show on roller skates. They never tripped or stumbled, and used their characters' contrasting personalities and styles for some amusing moments. Lastly, but not leastly, Frank the Opossum, puppetted by Kaylee Bryson, was entertaining without ever saying a word, utilizing all the physicality one could imagine coming out of a two-foot felt puppet.

Speaking of the Opossum puppet, the props team, led by Teagan Kirchner, Orion Roberts-Page, and Ethan Thompson, did a great job with their props, especially the felt-blood spilling opossum. The use of excessive rhinestones on the props and the set (designed by Henry Green, Daniel Rothlisberger and Hiroko Rose) helped match the over-the-top energy of the show. There was also a lot of clever symbolism, with special stained-glass windows showing a snake in the shape of a dollar sign, foreshadowing Tartuffe's greed.

Religion is never an easy subject for a high school play. However, Woodson Drama, with its over-the-top approach, managed to produce a high school show that was mature beyond its years. Thank you, Woodson, for daring to put on this important show and performing it beautifully.