

(SYNTHESIZER MUSIC)

ADAM LEFEVRE: You're listening to The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Prosecast.

HANNAH HESSEL RATNER: Welcome to the Prosecast for David Ives' new adaptation of Piron's "The Metromaniacs," running from February 3rd through March 8th at the Lansburgh Theatre. I'm Hannah Hessel Ratner, the Audience Enrichment Manager, and I'm here with Drew Lichtenberg, who is the Literary Manager here at the Shakespeare Theatre and Production Dramaturg on this very production. "The Metromaniacs" is the latest of David Ives' translated and adapted French Comedies, so, this is number three in the series, and we'll actually be putting together a book, so, everyone can see them together.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, "The David Ives Trilogy," we're going to bill it as, and he actually calls them transladaptations.

RATNER: Transladaptation. It's a great word from someone who's very, very good at words, and we'll be talking about that, I am sure. We'll also be joined, later in the podcast, by one of the production's actors, Adam LeFevre, who is also a poet, but before we are, just wanted to return to David Ives and his return to us. Drew, you've been working with him. You started working after "The Liar," but before "The Heir Apparent," so, you've been able to see his process now for two different plays.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, this is my fourth year at Shakespeare Theatre, and my very first show here, I arrived, and a month later, I think we started rehearsals for "The Heir Apparent," so, I came in right sort of at the in the end of that process, like, after the script had been written, and when it was ready to go into rehearsal, and, pretty much as soon as I got here, Michael wanted me to find another script for David to translate because he just loves working with him, he loves the results, audiences love the plays, they're very popular, so, my first year entirely consisted of a crazy search for a third French Comedy for David Ives to translate.

RATNER: And the idea with this and with many of the other rediscoveries that you do is to find plays that aren't on anyone's radar, right?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it's important to Michael, I think, to find plays that were very popular in their own time, but, for some reason, whether it's history or the changing winds of taste, have fallen out of what we consider to be the Classical canon, and it's also important to Michael to find a modern playwright or a modern writer to adapt these plays. We had a former poet laureate adapt a play by Schiller—

RATNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —a couple years ago, "Wallenstein," and that's, you know, it's something that's very important to Michael. He does not have to do this. He could be doing "Hamlet" and "Romeo and Juliet" every year, but, he—it remains a core part of our company's mission to rediscover these neglected plays.

RATNER: And once this relationship was formed with David Ives, it seemed like "Why not keep it going?" Do you think that this third one will be the last, or do you think there'll be more David Ives trasladaptions to come?

LICHTENBERG: Well, the funny thing about David is he had never written in verse before he did “The Liar” for us five years ago, which is kind of crazy to think about because “The Liar’s—”

RATNER: He’s so good at it!

LICHTENBERG: Because he’s very, very good at it, and “The Liar’s” one of the most produced plays in the country for the last five years, and French is not his language. His real first language, his real other language is German, actually, but, as he said, “You know, German Comedies few and far between.” There’s like—

RATNER: —not quite the same thing.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, there have been maybe two plays in hundreds of years written by the Germans that have been funny, so, yeah, the search is on for another language. I think we are all in agreement that the French thing has kind of reached its climax, and that we need to move on to other avenues and other cultures. One thing he said recently is that he’s taught himself Latin—

RATNER: Oh wow!

LICHTENBERG: —so he can read Plautus and Terrance in the original Latin.

RATNER: So, David Ives is basically just brilliant, really.

LICHTENBERG: He’s a pretty smart guy.

RATNER: He’s just, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: I mean, he’s also working with Stephen Sondheim—

RATNER: Right, right.

LICHTENBERG: —on a new musical based on films by Luis Buñuel, and just that sentence makes my brain hurt saying it outloud

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —how staggeringly awesome that sounds.

RATNER: And he’s one of the most produced playwrights in general in country, and has been for a while.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, “Venus and Fur” just got made into a film by Roman Polanski, which is also a staggering sentence to say outloud.

RATNER: And he’s also a really nice guy.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, he’s a sweetheart.

RATNER: And, luckily, we're gonna have a couple of opportunities, during the run, to have conversations with him in our audience. He's really open—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: —to connecting with people, which is exciting.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, he's actually doing—what is it, February 8th—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: He's doing two panels: One in the morning and one in the afternoon, and God bless David Ives—

RATNER: Indeed!

LICHTENBERG: —because that's above and beyond the call of duty, even—

RATNER: It's quite wonderful of him.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. So, yeah, I mean, he really wants to do Plautus, it seems. He calls it “The Honeymooners” in Latin, which sounds great, so, so, maybe—

RATNER: Things to look forward to hopefully.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: Well, so, usually at the top of these podcasts, we do a quick plot, but, I was thinking: I've now read the play a couple of times, I haven't been in the rehearsal room at all, and I know you have, so, probably, in performance, it's clearer to follow, but, there's an element of this plot that there's just really no point to going over, in some ways, I mean, because there's no amount of explanation that can twist and turn all the twists and turns of people playing people, and you just kind of have to ride the roller coaster, right?

LICHTENBERG: Well, yeah, the play's built of a kind of bird's nest of mistaken identities. There's a poet who assumes a pseudonym, and is staying at the house of this other person who has written a play—

RATNER: I feel like once you start to explain the plot, you just start yawning because—

LICHTENBERG: You're making it sound great.

RATNER: Well, no, no, no because the play itself is really exciting, but, the plot is just, there's just so many things to have to explain if you're trying to, you know, know what happens before you come and see it.

LICHTENBERG: It's one of those plays in which what is being dramatized is actually a state of confusion over who is who—

RATNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —and what is what, and that’s the fun of the play—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —is the confusion that arises from this plot, so, that’s, you know—once Michael started breaking it down with the actors in the room, we all found that it was very tightly-plotted, that, like, every beat of the play pretty much consists of plot—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —but, every beat of the play is a character being confused about to what another character is—

RATNER: It’s another kind of—

LICHTENBERG: —or one character pretending to be another character—

RATNER: —and it all kind of has a manic energy as it builds off of itself.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, there’s this kind of crescendo in the first act, as people are overtake by romance, right? Everyone’s in love with the idea of love, and keeps on falling in love with other people because they are who they presume each other to be, event though that’s not the case, and, then, it reaches this kind of plateau after Intermission, where just crazy things happen onstage. People act in ways that are totally unexpected, and there’s something about the swirl of mistaken identities that allows this kind of liberated libertine-ish behavior to unfold.

RATNER: So, I just want say, then, to audiences, with all of that in mind, don’t worry about coming in and not knowing what’s going on. You will figure it out the same way the characters figure it out in a really fun, exciting way. The other thing that audiences probably won’t know going in, because certainly none of us knew it before choosing this play, is who is this Alexis Piron, this playwright that we have rediscovered? You said that this was a popular play, and yet, his name has completely disappeared from all of our cultural records of French drama, it seems.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, well, when I started searching for a play, Michael wanted it to be from the early part of the 18th Century, which is often considered a kind of dead era for French Comedy. There’s Molière’s comedies in the late 1600s, and, then, usually, the history books skip a couple hundred years to “The Marriage of Figaro” by Beaumarchais, and we were really curious about why that was, why has this era been erased from history, and one of the reasons is that the Comédie-Française, which is the theatre that Molière’s plays were performed at, largely became a revival house, staging revivals of Molière plays, and the most popular new plays that were written with either afterpieces or prologues that were written to accompany plays by Molière, so, there was actually a huge dearth of full-length, five-act original comedies. It’s almost like French in the 1730’s was like Hollywood is now, where it’s “Star Wars, Part VII,” you know. It’s just a series of sequels or revivals.

RATNER: Money-makers, money-makers, money-makers.

LICHTENBERG: Right. The franchise of Molière and Racine was the popular franchise, so, everything that was ever written was either an emulation of that or was tacked on as a kind of afterpiece, and this was one of the few plays that was actually staged as a new play at the Comédie-Française, and that met with raves, so it's sort of this title, "La Métromanie," which—David Ives love the title. That was where it started. He was like, "What is this 'metromania' play? It's a great title. What was it about this play that was so exciting," and, it's kind of a complicated story, so, bear with me, and I'll try to make it as short as I can, but, this guy, Alexis Piron, he was born in Burgundy, which is a region famous for mustard and—

RATNER: Wine.

LICHTENBERG: --beef, and wine, not necessarily for playwrights, and he ended up moving to Paris in 1720s and writing for the unofficial theatres, the theatres outside the Comédie-Française—

RATNER: The "Fringe."

LICHTENBERG: The Fringe theatres, as we would call them today. In their time, they were called the Fairground theatres because they were literally outside the Paris city proper, and this was where pantomime was born, this was where Vaudeville was born, this was where burlesque was born. In fact, there was a law, passed by Comédie-Française, the said that these Fairground theatres could only feature one character talking at a time, so, in every play, you could only have one character speaking, and this was why melodrama arose because you would have melody plus drama, right, this very simple kind of plot, very sensational, usually underscored by piano or something, and Piron's first play was a one-character piece, in which Arlequin, the clown, is the only survivor of a biblical flood and he entertains himself by acting out all the plots of the plays that are being performed at the Comédie-Française, so it's this gigantic middle finger, sort of, jabbing in the eye of the Parisian literary establishment. He was this abhorious —

RATNER: So, he was a punk who wrote plays for the Fringe.

LICHTENBERG: He was an outsider. He was a popular craftsman. He was not a high-brow, pretentious literary writer. He was somebody who wrote for the people who wanted to have a good time and laugh at some, maybe, improper things. Another famous thing about Piron, from when he was an adolescent, is that he wrote an ode to a Priapus, and, if you don't know who Priapus was, he was the Greek god of the phallus, so it's a very adolescent kind of poem addressed to himself, in a way, very improper.

RATNER: So, how did he go from writing these Fringe/Fairground—

LICHTENBERG: So, how did he get into the Comédie-Française?

RATNER: —into the Comédie-Française, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: There was this scandal in Paris literary life involving "The Mercury," which was, still is actually, like, the most famous, it's like "The New Yorker" of French culture. It's like this very, very famous magazine, and this poetess, anonymous poetess from Brittany, which is the French version of Kentucky, basically.

RATNER: I'm sorry any listeners from Kentucky.

LICHTENBERG: Sorry anyone from Kentucky.

RATNER: Or Kentucky.

LICHTENBERG: Or from West Virginia.

RATNER: You didn't say anything about West Virginia!

LICHTENBERG: Well, it's like a mixture between West Virginia and Kentucky.

RATNER: Drew just likes insulting all the people.

LICHTENBERG: You know, Paris has a reputation for thinking that everyone outside of Paris is a hick, right, a hick from the sticks, so, I'm really, sort of, I'm not trying to characterize—

RATNER: No, you're bringing it out of the script. I know it's not you personally.

LICHTENBERG: Right, right. The attitude towards somebody writing poems from Brittany was equivalent to us, somebody writing poems from Oswego or somebody, you know, someplace that's far away, that's uncivilized, right. In France, either you're civilized or from some other place,

RATNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —and everybody was in love with her. Voltaire, who was, like, the very famous poet, playwright, man of letters at the time, started writing poems addressed to her in "The Mercury," proclaiming his undying love for her, for her poetry, assuming she must be beautiful because she wrote so well. Well, it turned out that this poetess was actually a guy, living in Paris, named Paul, who was having his revenge on the Paris literary establishment for not publishing his works, and "La Métromanie" is a play that is satirizing this craze for poetry and for poetesses. There's a plot in it that is very, very strikingly similar to the details of this so-called "Mercury Affair," and Voltaire was furious. He didn't want the play to be performed. The play was written in 1735, and it took three years for Piron to drum up the money to have it performed at the Comédie-Française.

RATNER: So, even though he's now out of the Fringe, he's still kind of giving his middle finger—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it's still, it's still—

RATNER: —to part of the culture.

LICHTENBERG: It's still very much a kind of transgressive move that is gonna maybe win you a lot of popular success because people are going to be titillated by how topical the references are in the play, but it's not gonna win you any friends, and French culture, in the 1730s—this is the era after Louis XIV, it's Louis XV, it is the height of sort of indolence. The middle class was highly-taxed, had very few opportunities for social mobility. Somebody like Piron looked at the aristocrats of the world, who were reading these poetry magazines, who were throwing private amateur theatricals at great expense, drinking champagne, eating beef, and thinking, "1. I wanna get in there into that room, and 2. Screw those people! Those people are so pretentious and up their own cloud," so, the play's this very interesting mixture of a kind of satire of decadent aesthetes and a celebration of those decadent

aesthetes. Along with being produced at the Comédie-Française, the height of fame was getting into the Académie française, and there were only 40 people alive who could be members of the Académie at one time, and they all had to be poets, and they all had to play the political game. Well, Piron was nominated to the Académie française, and he was going to get in, but, then his candidacy was rejected.

RATNER: Oof.

LICHTENBERG: Louis XV found the ode to Priapus, and used that as the excuse to get rid of him.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: But most people believe that it was this play, and it was his feud with Voltaire, who was an Académie member, that doomed him to obscurity.

RATNER: Great. Well, that's a great place to end before we get joined by Adam.

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RATNER: We are now joined by Adam LeFEVRE. Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to join us, Adam.

LeFEVRE: My pleasure. I'm very happy to be here.

RATNER: So, Adam is playing Francalou, who's the patriarch of the family.

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Francalou.

RATNER: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Francalou?

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Francalou.

RATNER: We're having fun pronouncing French things together, but—

LeFEVRE: Just pucker. You have to speak with a pucker.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it's the lip, the embouchure.

RATNER: Well, luckily, the script isn't in French now—

LeFEVRE: True.

RATNER: —thanks to David Ives.

LeFEVRE: David has taken care of that for us, thank God!

RATNER: So, what are the challenges of working, though, on this kind of language, of the rhyming couplets matched with modern language, yeah?

LeFEVRE: Well, there are, you know, there's good news, bad news thing. There are both specific challenges and some great kind of leg-ups in a sense. The text is so beautifully raw. David has done such a lovely job of translating and adapting this play that if you, you know, almost if you say it right, you can't go too far wrong. The trick is, in speaking any verse, to not make it sound—in this case because they're couplets—you know, to not make it sound—and this is no harm or no debunk to Ted Geisel, but, to sound like Dr. Seuss because if you hit the rhymes too hard consistently, it begins to sound a little goofy, a little, you know, a little self-commentating on, you know, "Look how clever the text is and we are." So, some of the rhymes are so very, very clever that you want them to play, the cleverness of it to play, but you don't want to underline it four times.

RATNER: Are there times when you decide to underline it, or when Michael—

LeFEVRE: Yeah, there are some, there are some when, you know, and also, you know, again with this, the metric regularity is something, and David is, you know, very strict, more strict than we discovered, and Michael Kahn was talking about this the other day. He said that David is even more particular and faithful to his metrics than Shakespeare.

LICHTENBERG: There's a great example from the first week when David would—he pointed out that "Oh, sir" was supposed to rhyme with "Grosser."

LeFEVRE: Right.

LICHTENBERG: Inside a rhyme.

LeFEVRE: Right.

LICHTENBERG: Inside a line.

LeFEVRE: Right.

LICHTENBERG: So, it was an internal rhyme: "Grosser," "Oh, sir," and "No, sir," right?

LeFEVRE: And I didn't—none of us picked that up at all

LICHTENBERG: None of us had any idea.

LeFEVRE: —and as soon as he mentioned it, I mean, it's a very, very clever bit, and now Michael, who has to say that, who's playing Mondor, slips it in, and it's one of those things that we'll see how an audience reacts, but, they're gonna hear it, and I think some people are gonna melt with appreciation, melt!

RATNER: We'll have quite the clean-up duty after the show.

LeFEVRE: That's right. Mop and bucket to Aisle 4. There you go.

LICHTENBERG: It'll be like a whole bunch of just butter melting onstage.

LeFEVRE: (LAUGHS)

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LeFEVRE: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Or beurre, as the French like to say.

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Beurre.

LeFEVRE: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Beurre.

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Buerre.

LeFEVRE: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Well, one of the reasons we wanted to talk to you also, Adam, is that you're leading a poetry workshop as part of our outreach efforts for the show, and you are—

RATNER: You are a published poet.

LeFEVRE: I am. I am. I confess it.

LICHTENBERG: How did that adventure in the world of poetry begin for you?

LeFEVRE: I actually was, you know, into writing poetry before I got involved in theatre as an actor. I started like a lot of us start, you know, as a very lonely, horny 15-year-old boy, who had read, at that time in school, Shakespeare sonnets and E.E. Cummings, so, my first efforts—and I found one actually in the attic when we were clearing out my parents' house about 15 years ago, which, I think, was my first poem that I assumed was just a poem, and I thought that this was the end of all, nobody needed to write another poem after this poem, and it was written as a Shakespeare sonnet in metrics and rhyme, but, it had no capital letters or punctuation—

RATNER: (LAUGHS) A Shakespeare-E.E. Cummings blend.

LeFEVRE: —to be faithful to E.E. Cummings, right, and it was about some disembodied, beautiful Asian girl who I couldn't reach. It was very bad—

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LeFEVRE: —and so heartfelt, you know. Anyway, so, I began my undergraduate years as actually, I was a bit of a jock in high school and college, and I was pre-med, and I discovered pretty quickly, as an undergrad, that I wanted to go elsewhere, and I became an English major, and was scribbling all that time, and it was only in college I began to get involved in theatre and actually starting out by wanting to write for the theatre, and then got pulled into performance, and, then, all of a sudden, the next thing I know, they chained me to the circus wagons, and off I went.

LICHTENBERG: Right. They got you. You ran off and joined the circus.

LeFEVRE: I ran off and joined the circus. Yeah, just like Pinocchio.

RATNER: But, you returned to poetry.

LeFEVRE: Well, I've always been writing poetry. I mean, that's something I've been doing, and, then I went—I did go after—a year after I graduated as an undergraduate, I went to—applied to and was lucky enough to get into the University of Iowa's writers workshop, a program there, which was very influential to me, I mean, I learned a lot about what's good and bad, and published my first book in my late 20s from Wesley University press, and book called, "Everything All at Once," and thought, somehow, that the rest was going to be history again, you know. As still very wet behind the ears, I said, "Well, that's one down. I'll write twelve more in the next five years," and published nothing for many years 'til I published a chat book a couple years ago, and now, I have book coming out this coming October 2015 from New Issues Press called, "A Swindler's Grace," and I've got another one ready. I'm writing again like a mad man because the clock is ticking.

LICHTENBERG: Congratulations! That's really very exciting!

LeFEVRE: Thank you. Thank you.

RATNER: Do you think now about writing for performance?

LeFEVRE: I do. I'm still writing plays.

RATNER: Yeah.

LeFEVRE: I'm still writing plays. I've have a few things done. I had a play done in Louisville some years ago, and I've got three unproduced plays that—you know any producers?

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: I'm not surprised you haven't slipped a script into the security offices.

LeFEVRE: That's right. Everyone's got a script in this town. (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Right. Right. Yeah.

RATNER: Do you find that you write poetry in the same way that you write plays, or are there different things that you're looking at?

LeFEVRE: You know, the thing that's wonderful, to me, about the combination of the things that I've been lucky enough to be able to do with some success in my life is I will—the thing about theatre that I've decided over the years, among the "Look at me, Look at me" thing that all of us performers have is the collaborative part of it, which is, I don't know, I think—I used to get a little of that when I played sports as, you know, a team sports in high school and in college. The sense of the community of fellowship of doing, everybody working hard towards some communal end, that's a feeling that you can't really get in other places, and I certainly get that when I work in theatre, much more in theatre,

quite frankly, than I do—I've done quite a lot of film, too, but, it's very different in that regard, so, that part of it has been very important to me, and, as a writer, particularly, as a poet, and not just as a poet, I suppose—I shouldn't speak for other writers because I'm sure it's the same—it very much is that, you know, that kind of sense, the Dylan Thomas sense of you, "My craft or sullen art, as I'm bent over my midnight table with the yellow fallow lamplight flowing on the empty paper, and nothing's coming, and nobody loves me, and nobody will ever love me," that kind of stuff, apparently, that's important to me, too. That feeds me something, something I'm sure, that, at least a large part, you know, largely narcissistic, but, also, I don't know, a community of language, with language, communing with language.

LICHTENBERG: Well, it's like instead of being on a team that's there in the room with you—

LeFEVRE: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —you're part of a team that's existed since the Greeks.

LeFEVRE: Well put.

LICHTENBERG: Right? It's the eternal team.

LeFEVRE: Yeah. Exactly, exactly, and you hope maybe to contribute, you know, half a line that's good.

RATNER: Something into the pot of language.

LeFEVRE: Something into the pot of language. Exactly.

RATNER: So, Francalou has written a play as well.

LeFEVRE: Yes. Mmm hmm, and—

RATNER: Do you find your own experiences helping to bring the character out?

LeFEVRE: Well, if my—Francalou has written a play, and Francalou also has the resources as an aristocrat of his time to be his own producer, you see, so, he writes it and he manages to get it up. He also—I love this character because he's—whether or not—and you know, the argument is everybody says in the play that, "Oh, my God, it's terrible. He's not a very good writer at all, and he'll drive you crazy." He'll say—Francalou's line is, you know, "You know, I just tossed it off as a laugh," you know, but, he really takes himself quite seriously, and hopes and wants to be a good writer. He's so enthusiastic about it, and, again, for him, it's the same kind of thing. He loves the collaborative part. He loves the joy that comes with theatre. He's very enthusiastic about other people participating. He understands the healing quality of theatre, in the sense, although, you know, it's done a bit as a spoof, as far as he's concerned. He writes this play to bring his depressed daughter of a funk. She's come back from "college," and she's gone goth, you know. "She's smoking Gaulois and just reading poetry, and she doesn't see the sunlight, and I want to bring her back to life, my little girl," so he sees this as an agency for reviving her, and I love that about him, and so, he understands that theatre has that quality, too. He's a lover, I mean, he's really loves people and he loves theatre, so, he's a—I'm enjoying playing him immensely. Sometimes, you don't want to bring the characters home with you that you play, and Francalou, the life of the party, "Drinks on me," you know.

RATNER: So, he's a good one hanging around.

LeFEVRE: Absolutely! "Tell me about your poems," you know, and so, yeah, I really have enjoyed discovering him, and enjoy playing him, and I think an audience, whether or not they like me, they're gonna love Francalou.

RATNER: So, you're about in the middle of the rehearsal process right now.

LeFEVRE: Yeah, a little past the lever there.

RATNER: What are you working on today? What are you gonna be doing?

LeFEVRE: We're gonna do some selective stuff, and now, we're gonna to start, I think, starting today, hopefully, be able to get a least one full run in every day. The interesting thing here is a lot of words—and it's been, it's the kind of thing where we have to know the bang-bang because there's no places for long method acting pauses, looking into, looking to your feet. You know, the text has got to dance, and we're pretty much in good shape there. The cast has just been so much fun. They're all wonderful, all very talented, skillful with language, which it has to be here. I mean, it's been very well-cast. They're also fun, which make this, you know, immensely pleasant for an old, you know, trooper like myself. But, we're at a place now where, I think, we're beginning to try to find, as we're picking up, and you know, it's a complicated farce. Farce is, story-wise, very difficult in a lot of ways because you have to tell the story in a way where the audience gets the story for the whole thing to kind of make sense about "Why is he doing that, who does he think he is now, who is he trying to be now," and all that stuff, so, it's taken us, well, actually, parched that ourselves 'cause if we don't know, they're certainly not going to know, and got most of that now, and David Ives has been wonderful in terms of—he's amazing. As someone who's also a—I think of myself as an aspiring writer—he is so quick and so ready to be able to fix a problem if we see something and say, "David, I don't understand this," and if he sees the problem, he, you know, almost—sometimes, when he was here, before rehearsal was over, he'd have a re-write that would address the problem, and that's fun to be a room when that's happening, too. You really feel like you're at the beginning.

RATNER: —and we get that so rarely here at the Shakespeare Theatre.

LICHTENBERG: I remember the first read-through, the first day. I was sitting next to David, and he kept flipping his script over, and writing all these numbers, and I was like, "What the hell is he doing," and it was page numbers, and he had thought of the fixes in his head, and was just writing on the pages, and then, as soon as the read-through was over, he went through and fixed every line by memory.

LeFEVRE: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: It was amazing. I had never seen anything like that.

RATNER: And the fact he working not just with fixing things, but fixing things and maintaining rhyme and maintaining the metric structure.

LICHTENBERG: Well, yeah, these would often be improving rhymes or adding in internal rhyme or, yeah, it was unlike anything I'd ever seen.

LeFEVRE: It was actually re-reading, shortly before we started this, Castiglione's "The Courtier." Do you know that book?

LITCHTENBERG: Never read it, but, yeah, I know of it.

LeFEVRE: I guess a lot of us know of it because it's referred to so much, but, it was written in 1520s, you know, later part of the Italian Renaissance, and it was a book which described the ideal courtier, and the various kinds of abilities and character that would entail, and it included a sweet-speaking mellifluous voice, the way one would carry oneself: You'd be athletic, but not thuggish, and also this wonderful Italian word, which I now apply to David Ives, called "sprezzatura," which simply means the ability to do something very difficult, and make it look very easy, a kind of studied nonchalance, and, as a writer for this, that's certainly how it appears, like, "He's not working! How does that SOB do this," and he's like, "Done." I guess one of the paradigms of that sprezzatura was when Cyrano composes a ballade while he's fencing and dueling with a guy, that's sprezzatura. Would we should all have sprezzatura!

RATNER: Wonderful quality to have!

LICHTENBERG: Oh yeah. David has said, you know, he thinks everything should be in verse, like, ads for the bus should be in verse—

LeFEVRE: Yeah, that's right!

LICHTENBERG: —which is the embodiment in the sense of sprezzatura.

LeFEVRE: Actually, if you want it to be memorable, you know you gotta—

LICHTENBERG: All of life should be an artwork, and vise-versa.

RATNER: Right, but, that doesn't take us too long to conceive and battle over, that it just comes naturally.

LICHTENBERG: It just flows out of us like water on a stream.

LeFEVRE: Yes!

RATNER: Well, things we should certainly strive for.

LeFEVRE: And the other thing about this: It's such a lively—I don't know if people who know "Heir Apparent" was done here and "Liar."

LICHTENBERG: "Liar" as well.

LeFEVRE: —and I guess you're doing "Tartuffe" this year, yeah?

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) "Tartuffe."

LeFEVRE: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) “Tartuffe?” And it is Moliere? Which translation?

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) It is a—

LeFEVRE: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) Wilbur?

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) No, by David Ball, I believe.

LeFEVRE: Okay.

LICHTENBERG: (IN FRENCH ACCENT) He’s at North Carolina in Raleigh.

RATNER: All of our French listeners hate you right now.

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

LeFEVRE: (LAUGHS) I’m in it! Let’s go!

LICHTENBERG: But, it is directed by a Frenchman, Dominique Serrand, who, I believe, is a Chevalier of the French Republic

LeFEVRE: That’s a cultural, that a cultural armor?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it’s like being a sir, it’s like being a knight, it’s like being Elton John.

LeFEVRE: Oh, but Chevalier sounds so much sexier.

RATNER: Oh, so much better!

LICHTENBERG: Way better.

LeFEVRE: Anyway, and I know, I mean, a lot of people have known that I’ve done, over the years, two, well, I did a “Tartuffe” that was a Richard, the famous Richard Wilbur translation, and I did a “School,” the Moliere “School for Wives,” which was translated by an American writer, named Paul Schmidt. I don’t know if you know of what I’m getting way in my babbling way. There’s a—David, somehow is American, this translation is American without being—with it maintaining a style that we would think of as, you know, “Well, Americans, we just plain spoken. We don’t really have style because style’s for wussies,” you know

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LeFEVRE: But, it manages to be very—I can’t think of any other word for it, but, American. The parlent is not hoity-toity at all, but, it’s very highly-styled.

LICHTENBERG: Well, yeah. I know what you mean, and it’s hard to put your finger on it, but, it feels like David Ives is always tapping into some screwball, maybe early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century tradition. Cole Porter seems to be in there, in a way.

LeFEVRE: Yeah, absolutely.

LICHTENBERG: The American musical theatre—

RATNER: It's such crafted language, but, it's so—

LICHTENBERG: But, it's populist.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Right? It's fun. It's low-brow.

LeFEVRE: Well, Cole Porter's a wonderful—I hadn't thought of that, but that's a wonderful kind of similarity there, that kind of wit. I guess it's kind of—it's wit.

LICHTENBERG: And the buoyancy of the language, too, right, the—

LeFEVRE: Yes! Oh, it absolutely percolates. It's fun. It's just great fun. It's great fun to play.

LICHTENBERG: There's also "Mad Magazine" in there, and, you know.

LeFEVRE: Yeah.

RATNER: Yeah, I mean, there's a whole, a whole tradition, I think, that we don't really get to see all the time in pop culture because pop culture doesn't contain the same sense of—

LICHTENBERG: Merrie Melodies, you know. It always makes me think of, it always makes me think of Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd.

LeFEVRE: Well, I have to tell you just a quick, you know, confession, and I've read admit this: I've learned more, as an actor, about comedy and comic timing from the Warner Brothers cartoons than I did from anywhere else. Hell with Julliard. Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Daffy Duck—'cause they all came out of Vaudeville, that stuff came out of Vaudeville, and they're brilliant, and there's something sunk in when I was watching them when I was six and seven, and you watch them now, as an adult, they're still hysterical, you know.

LICHTENBERG: Mmm hmm.

LeFEVRE: And things you missed when you were a kid, you don't get, but, that kind of—and again, buoyancy, wit, there's a wise-guy wit about it, you know, which is American, too, that kind of, you know, "That's why we won the damned war."

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Because of Bugs Bunny.

LeFEVRE: Because of Bugs Bunny.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

RATNER: Well, let us end, there.

LeFEVRE: Okay.

RATNER: Adam, thank you so much for joining us.

LeFEVRE: It's been great fun. Thank you for having me.

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RATNER: Well, that was really fun. Adam is a blast. But, I do, just before we end, want to piggy-back, maybe, on a couple of things he was talking about. First of all, that he is a poet, you mentioned that he's doing a workshop, and he's also part of our "Poets are Presents" series, which is going to be running the entire length of the production, so any night that you go to see "The Metromaniacs," in the lobby beforehand, there will a Washington DC area-based poet, and it's quite an amazing group of people: Young, older, published, not published, all sorts of interesting poets, and they're going to be using their lobby and their little writing place, their little desk, and they are required to write an original piece inspired by the experience of being in our lobby or inspired by the play, so, we're going to collect, out of this production, an armful of interesting poems reflecting what we are putting on stages, and our audience will get to participate in that as well, and that's, I think, very, very exciting. The other thing that Adam mentioned was we have "Tartuffe" coming, and we get to spend more time, this year, with French comedy and with Moliere. But, can you talk a little bit, maybe, about the difference between the structure of the two plays, and what Moliere is doing with comedy, and what Piron and Ives are doing?

LICHTENBERG: Well, the French love rules, right, so, to get a play produced at the Comédie-Française, it needs to be five acts, it needs to be in rhymed couplets, and it needs to observe the so-called rules of dramatic structure.

RATNER: These are the unities. These are Aristotle's unities.

LICHTENBERG: Right, the unity of time, place and action. It has to happen in real time, you have to have a lot of exposition because it has to have a crisis, a turning point, and a dénouement. What's interesting about both of these plays, which, I think, are both sort of classics of the French repertory, is that they subvert or they skirt the rules in different ways. "Tartuffe," talk about a controversial play! The King himself, Louis XIV stopped production of that play until Moliere revised the ending. So, it'll be interesting to see how we handle the ending in our own production. It was all about this argument that was supposedly about rules was, in fact, Moliere—is about content. What could you stage about religion in the 17th Century? And this play by Piron, people point to it and say, "This play is not Neo-Classical at all! It has fifteen plots maybe—

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: —or it has five plots cubed. It's really more, in my opinion of a picaresque. It's very reminiscent of "Gulliver's Travels" by Jonathan Swift, who was Piron's exact contemporary or Henry Fielding ("Tom Thumb"). It's this kind of fantastical allegory world, in which everybody's kind of a cartoon, but, also, kind of reflecting back on society in a complex way.

RATNER: And this is somewhat mirrored in the set because we have this kind of traditional French house—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: —the home, the one location, but, then, there are also these comical trees that have been placed there for the play within the play, so, we're both on the inside and on the outside and in this real world and not real world.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, you have this oxymoronical, very theatrical kind of landscape, in which you have a recreation of the forest inside a very opulent salon kind of room, and, yeah, there seems to be something of the period of the times that is anti-Classical, right, that is 1730s or 1750s being expressed in this play, which makes it, to me at least, fascinating because I'm totally a nerd for history.

RATNER: (LAUGHS) Well, there's certainly a lot to talk about in this play, so, it'll be great to have the opportunity to do that throughout the production.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, I'm more interested to see audiences' reaction to this play than the one we've done in a long time.

RATNER: Yeah, it'll be really fun.

(SYNTHESIZER MUSIC)

RATNER: Well, thank you all so much for listening. "Metromaniacs" is going to be running simultaneously for the first few weeks with "Dunsinane," and we have a Prosecast for that, too, so, if you enjoyed listening to us here, please listen to us there. Have a great day!

LICHTENBERG: Bonsoir.

LeFEVRE: You've been listening to the Shakespeare Theater Company's Prosecast for "The Metromaniacs. You can subscribe to the Prosecast series on iTunes" by searching for "The Shakespeare Theater Company" or listen at asides.shakespearetheatre.org.