

(GUITAR MUSIC)

STEVEN EPP: You're listening to the Shakespeare Theatre Company's Prosecast.

HANNAH HESSEL RATNER: Welcome to the Prosecast for "Tartuffe." This is our final Prosecast of the season! I'm Hannah Hessel Ratner. I'm joined by Drew Lichtenberg. Hello, Drew!

DREW LICHTENBERG: Hi, Hannah!

RATNER: And we're talking about "Tartuffe, which is going to be running from June 2nd to July 5th at Sidney Harman Hall, and Molière's—I'm going to put "comedy" in quotation marks, which you can't see, but I'm doing hand quotations—

LICHTENBERG: Yes, Steve Epp and Dominique Serrand, who really know their stuff, would question that genre categorization.

RATNER: Right, so, what we think of as a comedy may not be a comedy, and we'll talk about that, and later, we'll be joined by Steven Epp himself, who is playing Tartuffe, so, that's really exciting, but first, let's check in with Molière.

LICHTENBERG: Molière. It's one of those names in the theatre history books that people ought to know, we hear he's a big deal in France, the French really loved him.

RATNER: If you studied French in high school, you probably read or saw at least Molière play.

LICHTENBERG: He's like Shakespeare plus Chekov squared in France, but American audiences, meh. Do they really get Molière?

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Is Molière beloved here?

RATNER: This is—

LICHTENBERG: It seems like we always have to reintroduce him to people, and explain why he's such a big deal.

RATNER: Well, so, why is Molière such a big deal?

LICHTENBERG: Well, I think first, I think we should talk about why he's not well known here.

RATNER: Okay.

LICHTENBERG: Or why it's hard to get him 'cause—

RATNER: Well, and my guess is part of that goes back to conversations that we had during "Metromaniacs" about French comedy and—

LICHTENBERG: Right. One is that he's hard to translate, right?

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: He writes in alexandrines, in rhymed verse, and also in prose, but, it's very easy to rhyme in French. A lot of the linguistic wit doesn't come through with English translations. But the other thing is that I think he uses the stage in a way we're not used to playwrights using the stage.

RATNER: Hmm.

LICHTENBERG: Like Molière, he also helped invent ballet and opera. He wrote for the Opera when that was the name of a theatre in France, and he uses the stage in a kind of flagrantly artificial way, like, he embraces artifice in a way that we're use to psychological characters. We're used to empathizing with characters, and Molière gives us characters who are grotesques, who are extremes, who are caricatures doing caricature-ish things, and it makes us feel uncomfortable. It makes us feel funny things.

RATNER: Right, and this is why it's on that comedy/not comedy border—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: where they're caricatures, so, it feels like it should be comedic since it's out of the ordinary and somewhat satirical, but, it also makes you a little uncomfortable.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. We don't know if we're supposed to laugh at this stuff that is funny but is about, you know, sex neuroses and religious hypocrisy and hating your fellow man, right? We're not sure how to feel about the subject matter in Molière plays as well as the form itself makes us kind of uncomfortable.

RATNER: But it isn't just Americans who feel that way. I mean, because the history of "Tartuffe," in particular, shows us that French audiences and, particularly, the church, also felt very uncomfortable—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: With his work.

LICHTENBERG: Right. You want to—do you that history, Hannah?

RATNER: Well, I know a little about it, Drew, and you can, we can—

LICHTENBERG: I know a little bit about it, too. (LAUGHS)

RATNER: We can try this out together.

LICHTENBERG: I don't know as much as I should.

RATNER: "Tartuffe" was originally performed in 1664, and the church was "not a fan," is I think the easiest way of saying it. It was—"Tartuffe" had a lot of support from the King, had a lot of support from nobles, but, the church, which had a lot of power, said, "Uh uh, this play cannot be. We cannot do this

play in France,” and the play was completely banned from the stage. He created, I remember, a revised version with a different name and a different character name—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: But that, too—

LICHTENBERG: “The Imposter.”

RATNER: Fell under scrutiny, and it wasn’t until 1669 that he was able to do “Tartuffe” as “Tartuffe.” So that’s kind of the basics of what I know, but, let’s talk a little bit about the play itself, and why it’s so controversial. We talked about—I mean, we can throw out religious hypocrisy and all these things, but, who is Tartuffe, and what is he doing that makes the church uncomfortable?

LICHTENBERG: Well, he’s a man with a funny name.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Kind of like Molière himself. Nobody knows what Tartuffe means. It’s actually become synonymous in French and in American discourse for a certain kind of deception: Tartuff-ery, Tartuffism.

RATNER: Alright. So, let’s get back to the plot.

LICHTENBERG: The plot. Well, it’s—there’s this man named Orgon, who is a very seemingly rational, well-educated, devout, middle-class gentleman, and he’s obsessed with this figure named Tartuffe, who’s posing as a holy man and yet, everyone else in the family points out to Orgon that he drinks a lot, he eats all your food, he seems to make unwanted advances sexually. Orgon says, “This is ridiculous.” He’s engaged his daughter to marry Tartuffe, and there’s a great line in this adaptation: “You’ll have a baby with Tartuffe, and half will look like me and half will look like Tartuffe!”

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: So, it’s this very creepy desire by Orgon to become one with Tartuffe. It can’t be explained religiously. It can’t be explained psychologically. It’s just this insatiable need that this seemingly rational person has.

RATNER: And Tartuffe, in many ways, is a con artist who’s able to charm his way using religion as a, as bait.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, religion is this kind of Pandora's Box that, once opened, infiltrates every corner of life, right, and Orgon gives all of his possessions to Tartuffe, and there's a *raisonnable* character in the play. There's always a *a-raisonnable* is French for the reasonable man, right. He’s telling Argon, “Why are you doing this?” and then says to Tartuffe, “Why don’t you give back all of the things you’re taking from Argon? Isn’t it not Christian to take from someone,” and Tartuffe’s response is, “Well, how can I give back what he freely gives to me out of the goodness of his Christian heart?” So, Tartuffe has this very doctrinal answer for every vice, for every corrupt thing, for every perverted thing that he does. He’s

seductive, he's reasonable, and you start to get sort of sucked into his vortex of nodding your head and saying, "Yeah, it's true, actually."

RATNER: And with this production, I mean, Steven Epp is so charming himself and charming to watch onstage that it's hard to not get drawn in.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: So, let's talk a little—Let's transfer to talking a little bit about the production. We talked about the challenges of adapting it, and the adaptation that they're using is by David Ball, who is, I guess, best known for his book, "Backwards and Forwards," which is kind of like a primer for reading plays that I read in high school when I first started studying theatre. But, this adaptation is very clear, whereas I feel like a lot of Molière adaptations get caught in trying to recreate the language and have a lot of challenges with that, since it's such a hard thing to do, and his adaptation is not entirely in verse, but really—

LICHTENBERG: Some of it's in rhyme.

RATNER: Yeah, but really gives us forward motion with the story. It's very clear storytelling.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and I've watched a video of the production, and what's interesting is the way Steven and Dominique Serrand, the Director and also the Set Designer have found ways of physically augmenting the text in a way that feels faithful to Molière. They add all these physical bits of comedy that feel like extensions of Tartuffism. So, for instance, when Tartuffe first enters, he gets whipped in the back ceremoniously and this theme of whipping, who gets whips in what sort of scene and in what position they get whipped in is something that happens over and over again, and you can see how something that started as pious religious ritual becomes twisted around to its absolute opposite and used in sadistic ways, and I think both the text that they use has this kind of admirable clarity in showing how Tartuffism can spread, and the production, it's all these straight lines, and yet, you end up in a place that's completely crooked, is a good way of describing, yeah.

RATNER: Hmm, that's a really great way of looking at it. So, you mentioned that you've seen a video, so, this is actually, I mean, it's not that unusual for us at STC to do productions that are co-productions with other theatres, but, it's certainly the first time this season that it's happened in this way. This production has been in place in some variation for years and years.

LICHTENBERG: And they've been performing this for a year almost straight nonstop.

RATNER: Yeah, exactly. We've partnered with South Coast Rep and Berkley Rep, so, it's had two West Coast productions, and it's just coming here straight off of the Berkley Rep production, so, they've been working on it, and are not rehearsing it here, but, for us, it will be completely new.

LICHTENBERG: Although Steve said that the Berkley production was when it sort of all came together in a weird way.

RATNER: Well, and they changed casts.

LICHTENBERG: And they changed one cast member, I think, from South Coast to Berkley.

RATNER: Yeah, which is kind of neat because the Berkley cast, I think, there are three people in it who were in "The Tempest."

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: In our production of "The Tempest," so, that's kind of fun to look at for—

LICHTENBERG: I mean, you know, there's two ways to look at the co-production thing. One is the obvious: It's more practical, it saves money for the three theatres who partner, but another thing is that we partnered with these two theatres in order to make this production possible.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And we are having a national conversation about the arts in America.

RATNER: Yeah, I mean, it's pretty exciting that this can be a production that lives across a huge country.

LICHTENBERG: The entire country in a whole year of time. I mean, that is such a gift for these actors and such a rare thing, I think, for audiences across the country to experience.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: I mean, I remember Steven was Truffaldino in our "Servant of Two Masters" four years ago, three seasons ago, and Michael immediately said to me, Michael Kahn, "We have to find a project for Steven. We need to get Steven back," and it took until this long because he was so in demand at other theatres and so many other theatres wanted to work with him that the only way we could get Steven back this time around was to partner in this way.

RATNER: Well, luckily we have Steven back with us today, and he'll be joining us in just a moment.

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RATNER: We are now joined by Steven Epp. Hello! How are you?

EPP: Hello! Great! Wonderful to be here.

RATNER: Usually, for these special guests, we have people coming out of the rehearsal room and joining us, and today is somewhat of a special situation since the rehearsals haven't been here, but we are lucky that Steve is here doing all sorts of things for us this morning.

EPP: Yeah, busy day.

RATNER: Having a photo shoot and all other things.

LICHTENBERG: Auditioning for a show possibly next year.

EPP: Yeah. You never know.

LICHTENBERG: You never know. Fingers crossed.

EPP: Yeah, you just got to keep as many irons in fire as you can.

RATNER: And you're just coming out of the production at Berkley.

EPP: Yes, we've just come off a really successful, very exciting run at Berkley Rep after having recreated the show last summer. We were starting rehearsal just about now actually a year ago in Costa Mesa for South Coast Rep at a run in May-June.

LICHTENBERG: And you say "recreated," this show has a history with you.

EPP: Yes. We first invented this production at Theatre de la Jeune Lune in Minneapolis, which was a company that Dominique Serrand, who is the Director and Set Designer of the project that we had in Minneapolis. We first did the show in 1999. I was 7.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS) You've aged beautifully over the years.

EPP: Thank you, and then, we actually re-did it in and toured it. We did it for touring in 2001, and then, we brought it back one more time in 2006 and ran it in rep with this production of "The Miser" that we had done all over the country at that point, so, we have a long history with it.

RATNER: So, how has it changed over all of these years?

EPP: You know, the essential gesture, the essential take that we have on the show, which is not the way that people normally approach "Tartuffe" is the same. It's really the same spirit and the same sort of muscle that we go at the show with. What's evolved is ourselves as artists. There's been cast changes. It's just that sort of natural maturity that comes with being able to live with the piece for so long and return to it. I mean, I think it happens to Shakespeare. I know that in France, there's a great tradition of a director always returning to certain plays and going back to Molière, there's a famous production of "The Miser" that this famous, this big director in France did, like, seven different, like, starting it when he was in his twenties and directing it one more time when he was 80 or something.

RATNER: I guess we were talking about that with "The Tempest," too, with, since Ethan had returned to it a number of times.

EPP: Yeah.

RATNER: And that there are a lot of plays that people will continue to go back to.

LICHTENBERG: Oh, and what was his name? He was the AD of the Guthrie. Garland Wright.

EPP: Oh, Garland, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: His "Tempest" apparently at the Shakespeare Theatre was amazing right before he died.

EPP: Yeah, I mean, I think there's, you know, there's just, with a great play, there's just always more to find and there's so much you, I think, you always feel like, "Ah, we missed that the first time" or, you know, it's only during the run when you're in front of the audience that you really start to realize what's there, and so, to have that opportunity is fantastic.

RATNER: Yeah, and you've been working on it with Dominique this whole time.

EPP: Yes.

RATNER: And you have a very long history with him. Can you talk a little bit about maybe how your relationship, your artistic relationship got started?

LICHTENBERG: So, he discovered you when you were three years old.

EPP: Yes, yes.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: From in the womb.

EPP: Yes, exactly.

RATNER: And he was just a baby at the time as well.

EPP: Yeah, I think so.

LICHTENBERG: A cigarette-smoking, French baby.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

EPP: Well, he's one of the founders of Jeune Lune. He's one of the founders, and I started with the company about four or five years into its existence, but I was with the company for 25 years, and, so, we just, we logged a lot of time on stage together because he always played the leads for years and years, you know, and the—

RATNER: That's why he started the company right?

EPP: Right, exactly, and us younger ones—

LICHTENBERG: Just like Molière, right?

EPP: Yeah, and in a way, through a classic apprenticeship type experience because you started with smaller roles and you eventually worked your way up, and the actor with us who plays Laurent, he's been in the production since the first time we did it, and he was 17 when we did this show. He was a senior in high school and has grown and developed that role, and then he—

LICHTENBERG: Laurent is the old guy in the wheelchair, right? No.

EPP: No, Laurent is the sidekick, the henchman.

LICHTENBERG: Oh yeah. Okay.

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: I know who you're talking about now.

RATNER: So, he can expand with age. He can be any age.

EPP: Yeah. But, Dominique and I, we spent many, many years onstage doing all kinds of roles, and so, you know, over time, that history that comes from living together in front of an audience night after night as well as that creating so many pieces together, we worked increasingly as he as a Director and myself as sort of the Head Writer of projects and usually being one of the lead characters, lead actors in the project. And sometimes, he was directing and acting. He used to do that a lot. So, we just have a very dense working relationship.

RATNER: And now, you're also Co-Artistic Director. Yeah.

EPP: And now, we're have a new company called The Moving Company

LICHTENBERG: Is this an official production of The Moving Company?

EPP: I don't think we're allowed to say that it is, as much as we'd like to.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS) It's just a coincidence that all the members—

EPP: Yeah, because we're not actually putting in any money into it. I think, I mean, if you were, we're really the creative behind it, and all our designers are the designers, and you know, so, it's—

RATNER: Well, and that can be an interesting concept for a company, a company that you get other people to pay you to do the work. It works out well. Yeah.

EPP: Yeah, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: The way it's supposed to work.

EPP: We, just this past year, did a new version of "Love's Labour Lost" that we, that the Actors Theatre of Louisville produced, but, we, again, we adapted, highly adapted, basically got rid of all the play, almost, and then, sort of filled it up with stuff from other Shakespeare plays, but, it was all our designers, our actors, you know, but they produced the piece.

RATNER: Are you working on anything else right now?

EPP: We have, we have a bunch of projects that are at different stages of development. We just finished a new piece that we workshopped at the University of Texas in Austin that's a complete new creation,

that's all about—it's called "Refugia," and it's five chapters. It's almost like five short stories put together and it's one evening, but it each deals with crossing a border of some sort, so, it's a way, it was a way for us to deal with issues in the world right now of immigration, exile, refugees, this mass movement of peoples that are happening in so many parts of the world, and some of it's very contemporary and some of it's more metaphoric and some of it's more historic, but, it was a framework for a really gorgeous piece that we hope will get a chance to further develop.

RATNER: And you're working geographically all over, but, you're still based in Minneapolis, your company.

EPP: Yes, yes.

LICHTENBERG: So, what was it about "Tartuffe," specifically, in 1999, when I was -5 years old, that you guys gravitated to? I mean, was it just the fact that it's a great play?

EPP: (LAUGHS) Well, there's that. It was one of those—we always returned to Molière as a company, I think, in a way that certain maybe British companies or American companies might gravitate to Shakespearian if they do a wide range of work. You're always sort of pulled back to Shakespeare at some point, and for us, we were always, because of the French roots of the company, we always went back to Molière, so, it was following the whole chain, there'd been sort of that point in the mid-90's where Congress shifted in '96 back to becoming completely Republican-controlled, and there was a lot of, it was that whole point where there were trying to just completely eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts, and they were saying it was because it was supporting pornography, that basically, what these artists were doing, what was being funded was being pornography, and we said "Okay, this is the moment to do 'Tartuffe' because this is complete hypocrisy and this is taking one reality and completely twisting it for their own political purposes," and that's kind of what, at the moment, said this is the time to go back to that play.

RATNER: And why now?

EPP: Well, unfortunately, it's still just as pertinent as it was then, and what we've been finding, and especially—we just felt this so strongly in Berkley, it's just, it resonates stronger than ever, and I'm very excited to bring it here because I think even though it's twisting of religion and for particular purposes, especially the way we do the production, there's a very strong political manipulation that's going on.

LICHTENBERG: Well, it becomes very explicitly about power—

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Towards the end of the play.

EPP: Yeah, and that twisting and layering of power tied with sexuality tied with just blatant lying.

RATNER: Well, the last time our audience saw you was a very different type of role.

EPP: Very different. It couldn't, it really couldn't be more different. (LAUGHS)

RATNER: So, that was "Servant of Two Masters," for our listeners who remember.

LICHTENBERG: It would be interesting to put your Truffaldino and your Tartuffe in a play together.

RATNER: Yeah.

EPP: Yeah, exactly. I think—

LICHTENBERG: It's two of the most opposite characters, right?

EPP: I don't know what'd happen.

RATNER: So, what's the, what's the difference for you?

EPP: I'm afraid that Tartuffe would just kill him.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: That's probably true.

LICHTENBERG: He would not last long.

EPP: No.

LICHTENBERG: Poor Truffaldino. Except he can't die.

EPP: Yeah, no.

RATNER: So, how do you approach them differently? I mean, our audience has seen you do the clown in Comedia.

EPP: Right, yeah. I mean, for, you know, "Servant" was such a pleasure. We had such a great time doing that show. It was fantastic doing it here because it was the chance—Michael Kahn gave us the opportunity to recreate the show. We had originally done it at Yale, and then, we thought it was sort of over, and so, we got to completely rework it and it was a—we had such a blast basically doing it here with the audiences, and that show is just, it's just a love poem, it's just, you know, it's just, I mean, it's a love poem to comedy, it's just comedy for the pleasure of how funny can we be. There's just barely enough plot, you know, to hold the thing together, and there's a lot of sweet stuff along the edges, and so, it's a delight. It's like a little feast, and, but, it's also that exploit of, you know, there's a certain amount of improvisation and certain amount of looseness around how the show was done, and that only comes when you sort of embrace a kind of danger. There's a danger to that, and the audience has to feel it, that sense that things could go really wrong, and they could really fail, they could fall flat on their faces, which you do, depending on what the audience does. So, there's that. There's a particular, sort of, down and dirty muscle behind that kind of comedy. With "Tartuffe," it's going at it in almost that same visceral way, expect we approach it, instead of approaching it as all out comedy, we approach as a tragedy really. We don't take on the play as a farce, which is how it's usually done. We really approach is as a tragedy, and for several reasons. Partly, because the play—and to make sure that it has to feel dangerous. It's really important that the play feels as politically dangerous as it did when he wrote it, which it was. He had death threats against him. He, you know, the play was banned, he had to

go through all these things to get it finally produced, and between the time when he first wrote it and when it was finally allowed to be played, he wrote “Don Juan” and he wrote “The Miser,” which are both very different plays for him, and they’re very bitter. They’re very—there’s a mean-spiritedness behind it, and I think that’s telling, and, particularly, the “Don Juan,” we felt like instead of “Tartuffe” being done—very often, he’s done as this very creepy, slimy, ogre-y thing, and he’s fat and drooling and, you know. We said, “No, he should be a Don Juan. He should, he should be a seducer. That’s how he succeeds.” So, that was a key to how we—difference, key difference in how we chose to go at it, and then, that kind of informed most of the choices.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, yeah. There’s something “Servant”-like about your Tartuffe. We see you eating an apple at one point.

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Very seductive, very good with language, those all feel like very self-conscious references.

EPP: Yeah, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And also, you know, it’s kind of, I think, a—you’re describing the difference between a kind of Chris Bayes aesthetic—

EPP: Yes.

LICHTENBERG: And a Dominique Serrand one.

EPP: Which is, and, you know, Chris started with us.

LICHTENBERG: Right.

EPP: He and I started at Jeune Lune. We were the children in the company.

RATNER: Chris being the Director of “Servant of Two Masters.”

LICHTENBERG: The Director of “Servant of Two Masters” and Dominique the Director of “Tartuffe.”

EPP: And very, in those early days that we were both starting with the company, Jeune Lune, at that time, we were known for that kind of comedy. That was sort of all of our signature, so, in a way, what Chris’s work that he has continued to do, and has honed and developed brilliantly as a teacher and a director, is sort of early Jeune Lune, and then, in the meantime, he left the company and went and he worked with Garland Wright at the Guthrie, and then, he’s moved to New York, and teaches at Julliard, Yale and all these things. Jeune Lune, we kept evolving as a company. We kept digging into all sorts of different, you know, types of works, including a lot of opera, who really began to influence, I think, a certain scale of what we were doing, but, we also did a lot of huge novel adaptations and a lot of, and, increasingly work with tragedy, and it’s always been interesting to us because Molière was first and foremost, he wanted to be tragedian. He wanted to be a great tragic actor, but, he was just brilliantly funny, and all of us as Jeune Lune, in a way, were more natural comics, but we all, sort of, wanted to do great big tragedies.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

EPP: So, we have a very, we understand that drive and that, I don't know, that sensibility, and so, I think, in some of our best work, one thing people would often say is that they would feel in our comedies there was always this underbelly of tragedy behind it, right behind it, which is very important to have that understanding for comedy, and then, vice-versa. Our tragedies and our heavier or more—I hesitate to use the words "serious work" because we didn't go at it serious, but the strong, muscular, brutal work always had a playfulness to it somehow at the same time.

LICHTENBERG: Well, yeah, it's really weight, something that has heft dramatically and morally—

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And critically. Yeah, I think it really comes through in this production of "Tartuffe," and Dominique was also saying you played Hamlet in Minnesota.

EPP: Yeah. We did a production of "Hamlet" in Minnesota in the early 2000's, and I was Hamlet.

LICHTENBERG: So, that happened.

EPP: That happened.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

EPP: It was a great production, and we actually, we toured that as well, and, in fact, that went to New York briefly, yeah.

RATNER: So, do you have any roles that are on your bucket list of the parts you really want to dig into?

EPP: Is Michael Kahn listening? (LAUGHS)

RATNER: He could be.

LICHTENBERG: We could make him listen to this.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Have you guys done "The Misanthrope?"

EPP: You know, that is one of the few Molières we have never done, and if Dominique were here, every time it comes up, he's, he doesn't know how to finish the play. He doesn't believe in the end of the play. He doesn't—

LICHTENBERG: The end is the best part of the play.

EPP: He doesn't buy it, and so, he doesn't know—and it's the same thing. That's the problem with "Tartuffe" is that we know the only way Molière got it produced was sort of doing this concession to the King and getting "Tartuffe"—

LICHTENBERG: The Government Inspector.

EPP: Yeah, and normally, originally, the play ended with Tartuffe winning, so, although we do, more or less, the play was finally, the five-act version where Tartuffe is arrested, the way what happens, some events that we added, try to, at the same time, make it truer to what Molière really intended. So, I don't know. With "The Misanthrope," someday, maybe, I don't know, but—

LICHTENBERG: Well, there is that sense you get watching "Tartuffe—" and sorry, I realize the question is "What is your bucket list."

EPP: Yeah.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: But, they call it tartuffery, right?

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: The art of religious hypocrisy.

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And even though Tartuffe loses in the play, we are all victims of tartuffery much to this day.

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: He has one.

EPP: And you feel that in our production very strongly. The family is destroyed, and they literally, when he leaves, there's this beautiful image where they are trying to barricade the door to hopefully keep him out or the next one. (LAUGHS) But, you have this sense that he just sort of walked down the street—

RANTER: Mmm hmm.

EPP: Went into the next house and started doing the same thing.

RATNER: (LAUGHS) Tartuffe is always out there.

EPP: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: I'd like to see your Alceste. I think you would be great Alceste.

EPP: Yeah. Actually, I would love to do it.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

EPP: The one thing I realized, as I've gotten older that I am a bit of a Misanthrope, so—

LICHTENBERG: And better you than Larry David, right, since he's doing Broadway plays now.

EPP: (LAUGHS) Yeah, yeah.

RATNER: Well, hopefully, we will see you again on our stage.

LICHTENBERG: Too humble to say.

EPP: Yeah, yeah. I would love it.

RATNER: And thank you so much for joining us today.

EPP: Thank you! My pleasure!

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RATNER: It was wonderful to have Steven with us!

LICHTENBERG: I adore him.

RATNER: He's delightful.

LICHTENBERG: I don't know why I adore him so much, but, I just do. He's such a nice man and so, so, so talented.

RATNER: Oh my goodness. So talented.

LICHTENBERG: And Dominique, you know, he came a couple weeks ago, and said some very provocative and interesting things, but, one thing he was unanimous on is how talented an actor Steve is, and how you can use him in so many different ways, and I think it's interesting that he was talking about the way he was used by Chris Bayes in "Servant of Two Masters" and he was used in a completely opposite way in this production of "Tartuffe," and both are kind of equally satisfying and fascinating to look at.

RATNER: I kind of wish I had seen his Hamlet. I'm so curious about that.

LICHTENBERG: I know. I know. Well, also, when he talks about his years in Jeune Lune, it just sounds like, you know, running off and joining the circus. He's had such an amazing career and such a singular career in American theatre. 25 years of these productions that, when he describes them, sound so incredible.

RATNER: Right, and, I mean, 25 years, the company closed down 7 or 8 years ago now.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, 2009.

RATNER: Yeah, so, it's been—his career has certainly developed since then as well.

LICHTENBERG: And, you know, he won the Helen Hayes Award in 2012, and I think there's been a slow-dawning recognition, now that he's a freelance actor and available to be cast in shows that, like, "Oh, we can sort of spread this Jeune Lune magic around the country," so, in some ways, it's terrible it happened. Obviously, no one wishes for an internationally-renowned decorated theatre company to go under in the way they did, but, it's been a boon to Berkley, to us—

RATNER: Yeah, and it's nice that he's starting to get recognition, really, as one of America's best theatrical performers because he's certainly, he certainly is, and, you know, he was talking about "Servant of Two Masters" and that quality that that show had, this kind of aliveness onstage, and I'm sure a lot of that comes from Chris Bayes and his direction, but, I think a ton of that just comes from him onstage. He really does have the ability to be so fresh and on his toes and alive, and I think it will be really exciting to see that in a character like Tartuffe, and we were saying, you know, in the beginning, he really makes you want to lean into him and kind of understand why you would fall for this type of con.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it's a performance in this show that is very unlike, I think, what people might be expecting. I think that people are going to be surprised by the dramatic chops and how sexy, in a sinister way, how seductive he is, and how he has this quality that's kind of, yeah, nobody falls for it except for Argon, but, you can kind of see how he would be such a seductive mythic kind of figure. He was saying that comedy needs to have a danger, right, in order to—it needs to have weight behind it in order to be funny, but, also, "Tartuffe," there needs to be something seductive about him or the play just becomes this one-dimensional orang against a kind of straw man political target, you know. There needs to be something magical—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: About the character in way that Iago can be so seductive or the great villains in Shakespeare can be so seductive.

RATNER: Do you know, did Molière play Tartuffe, or was Molière playing Orgon?

LICHTENBERG: He played Orgon. I think La Grange played Tartuffe, who was sort of Molière's Richard Burbage. In his—Madeleine Béjart, who was the older actress who he founded a company with when he was 19, played Dorine, who was the servant woman who's very plain-spoken.

RATNER: I love that you know that. (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Well, what's interesting thing is that Molière, right around the time he was writing "Tartuffe," or a couple years before, married Armande Béjart, who was 20 years younger than Madeleine, and, most likely, her daughter, possibly her younger sister—

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: And, if you're Molière, and you join this theatre company with, as a 19-year-old, with this older woman, did they have a relationship, him and Madeleine? And did he then have a relationship with her sister/daughter?

RATNER: Hmm.

LICHTENBERG: I mean, this is one of the great mysteries in Molière's life, and I think there's behind Molière. He also died; he collapsed onstage while performing in a play called "The Imaginary Invalid," which we did a couple years ago.

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: He just had this very kind larger-than-life mythos surrounding him.

RATNER: So, maybe it's time that for someone to do a biopic of Molière or—

LICHTENBERG: Well, Bulgakov wrote a play called "Molière," and it's all about his relationship with Stalin, and how Molière's relationship with Louis XIV is more to his relationship to Stalin.

RATNER: Maybe not that play, but—

LICHTENBERG: But, the Armande plot is in there, the mother/daughter/sister thing going on is in there.

RATNER: There's certainly a lot more to talk about, and, luckily, we'll have opportunities. There are discussions all throughout the production, including the Page and Stage discussion, which we'll have the Director and Scholar that Drew will be moderating, and there's also going to be a Symposium for this production of "Tartuffe" that actually neither of us will be there, but, will be filled with lots of other really smart and interesting people, and looking like probably some of the performers and artistic team.

LICHTENBERG: And I really want us to talk Michael into doing "The Misanthrope" with Dominique.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: I hope this production is a huge success, and that it leads to us commissioning a "Misanthrope" from the Jeune Lune diaspora.

RATNER: Alright, so now we know what Drew's dreams are—

LICHTENBERG: I'm just thinking outloud. Uh huh.

RATNER: And we hope that you see the production and enjoy it, and we look forward to picking up the Procast again in the Fall next season with a ton of really amazing productions that we look forward to diving into, so, thank you, Drew, for this season of podcasts.

LICHTENBERG: Thank you, Hannah.

(GUITAR MUSIC)

RATNER: And thank you, Roc, for editing and sound engineering our Podcasts all season long.

EPP: You've been listening to the Shakespeare Theater Company's Prosecast for "Tartuffe." You can subscribe to the Prosecast series on iTunes" by searching for "The Shakespeare Theater Company" or listen at asides.shakespearetheatre.org. Tickets to "Tartuffe" are available by visiting shakespearetheatre.org or calling (202) 547-1122.