

# Los Angeles Times

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Steven Houska, left, Charles Fathy, Clara Bellar

ANGELO LOUKAS

## THEATER BEAT

### 'Doctor' a wacky take on Molière

Post-commedia antics are the prescribed treatment in "The Doctor Despite Himself" at Electric Lodge. Ipanema Theater Troupe's wacky take on Molière's 1666 "Le Médecin malgré lui" is awash in slapstick aplomb.

That is obvious from the pre-show intrusion by wood-cutter Sganarelle (Charles Fathy) and bickering Martine (Clara Bellar), his shrewish wife, as we take our seats.

Their Punch-and-Judy combat leads to Martine's revenge — giving her thick-headed spouse his comeuppance by passing him off as a learned physician. The plan backfires, to put it mildly.

In director Guru Monteiro's

hands, "Doctor" gambols about the black-box setting as though it's a tony Second City workout. The translation by Bellar and the cast is slight but serviceable, and designer Swinda Reichelt's costumes must be seen to be believed. Constructed of foam-core and stretchy elements, the outfits merge circus whimsy with a structural extravagance that suggests pet chew toys come to life.

Fathy's deadpan drollery and Bellar's amiable hectoring are in the classic style, albeit overextended. Raquel Brusso gets ample mileage from the statuesque figure and blond locks of her tarty nursemaid to ingenue Lucinde (also Bellar), whose muteness provides Sganarelle's big test.

She and innamorato Leandre (Brad Schmidt) wear campy color-coordinated cat suits, and Steven Houska's various

authority figures go from loopy to loopier in farcical form and function.

It is not really satirical, apart from a running list of treatments that directly reflects the current healthcare debate. But the company's main objective is unassuming silliness. As such, "Doctor" is enjoyable, even if Molière's wit plays second fiddle to the wardrobe.

— DAVID C. NICHOLS

**"The Doctor Despite Himself,"** Electric Lodge Performance Space, 1416 Electric Ave., Venice. 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Nov. 8. \$20. (310) 823-0710. Running time: 1 hour, 10 minutes.

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stage

## NEW THEATER REVIEWS

**GO THE DOCTOR DESPITE HIMSELF** In Molière's farce, oafish woodcutter Sganarelle (Charles Fathy) takes a (rubber) mallet and beats his wife, Martine (Clara Bellar), like a dirty carpet, and why not? since she kind of likes it. However, this doesn't prevent Martine from spitefully telling a passing dolt (Brad Schmidt) that Sganarelle is a famous surgeon who enjoys being paid for his toils by receiving even more-savage beatings. The dolt beats Sganarelle like a brass gong and then hires him to cure his master's daughter (Raquel Brussolo) of muteness. Of course, it turns out that the girl is only pretending to be mute so she can trick her dullard dad (Steven Houska) and marry the handsome student (Brad Schmidt) she loves. More beatings ensue. The first thing you need to know, even before watching the play's casual thumpings, is that director Gulu Montiero's madcap production is steeped in the art of the clowning. The show has the wonderfully shrill pitch and frantic pace of a living cartoon.



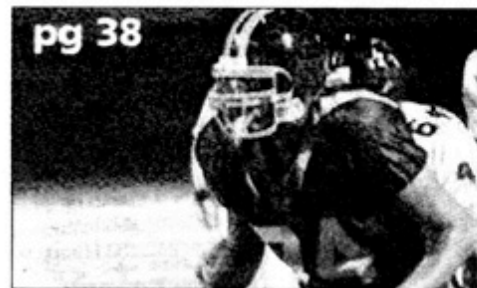
Photo courtesy of Ipanema Theatre Troupe

The cast know the way around the 17th-century gags — and the goofiness is heightened by designer Swinda Reichelt's jaw-dropping costumes, which turn these classical characters into outlandish figures risen from some other dimension. In his leering turn as Sganarelle, Fathy's grinning mug floats in what appears to be a blubbering multicolored beach ball, and when he turns into "the doctor," he is fitted with a bizarre collar with dangling tassles your cats would adore. Sganarelle's spiteful wife wears a

plastic-y swoop skirt covered with rubber balls — and she then returns later as a sexy housemaid, wearing weird plastic blond braids and gigantic plaster breasts. The result of all this artistry is a production that is both timeless and yet cracklies with the freshness of a living children's picture book. Electric Lodge, 1416 Electric Ave, Venice; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 & 7 p.m.; through November 8. (310) 823-0710. [www.electriclodge.org](http://www.electriclodge.org). An Ipanema Theatre Troupe production. (Paul Birchall)

# SANTA MONICA Mirror

REFLECTING THE CONCERNS OF THE COMMUNITY



OCTOBER 22 - 28, 2009

## THEATER REVIEW

### The Doctor Despite Himself

#### A Comedic Poke in the Eye at the Medical Establishment



(L-R) Brad Schmidt (l.), Charles Fathy, Raquel Brussolo.

photo by Stanley Newton

Beverly Cohn  
Editor-at-Large

Considered one of the greatest masters of comedy in Western literature, and the most popular playwright of his day, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known by his stage name of Moliere, left behind an enduring body of work serving as a road map for playwrights on how to write scathing, but hilariously funny comments on social mores.

Moliere was strongly influenced by the Italian Commedia dell'Arte style of theatre which created a group of "stock" characters such as the "rebel," the "libertine," "the miser," the "trickster," the "hypochondriac," and the silly "cuckolds," most of whom have roles in his dozen satirical plays. Under the auspices of the royal court, Moliere operated with immunity from attacks by the church and ironically died in 1673 during the production of his final play, *The Imaginary Invalid*.

In keeping with this stylized form of theatre, gifted director Gulu Monteiro, with his most talented Impanema Theater Troupe, put together a delightful production of *The Doctor Despite Himself*. The world premiere of the director's slightly modern adaptation, is a hilarious romp about a lowly woodcutter named Sganarelle, gorgeously played by Charles Fathy, who has a propensity for occasionally beating his wife Martine, played with great gusto by Clara Bellar. After yet another cartoonish beating, Martine decides to get even and convinces two strangers in search of a doctor looking for a cure for the mute daughter of a wealthy gentleman, that her husband is a famous physician. She cautions them that he will deny being a doctor, but if they give him a good beating, he will confess. So, the fun and games of deceit begin.

Performed on a bare stage, no set is needed, as the amazing costumes designed by Swinda Reichelt fill the stage with brightly colored, outlandish clown, jester, or buffoon styled clothing, which are almost characters unto themselves. Special kudos to Reichelt for her imagination and creativity.

Monteiro's adaptation has stayed true to Moliere's play, combining some of the dialogue with modern references to current pharmaceuticals and the long list of disgusting side effects as seen on television. In one compelling scene, a couple is seeking Sganarelle's help, but he keeps asking for more and more money before giving them a bogus cure. Finally, the couple winds up giving him everything they own, including the shirts off their backs, literally.

The rest of this well trained ensemble, include Raquel Brussolo who plays the sexy nursemaid. Her costume reflects her "work" as the front consists of two oversized breasts with huge protruding nipples. Brussolo can give a lesson in the use of a prop, as the handling of her mop is quite inventive and very amusing. Other members of the cast include Steven Houska who plays three characters, and Brad Schmidt who also plays three characters, all of whom are distinctly developed.

This production is a family play and although they might not get the social commentary aspects of the story, the slapstick element will delight children who will enjoy this romp as much as adults.

*The Doctor Despite Himself*  
Electric Lodge  
1416 Electric Ave.  
Venice, CA 90191 (onsite parking)

Runs Fri.-Sun. through November 9, 2009  
Tickets: \$15-\$20  
Reservations: 310.823.0710