

AISLE SAY San Francisco

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

by Pierre Carlet de Marivaux
Presented by California Shakespeare Theater
and San Jose Repertory Theatre
Adapted and Directed by Lillian Groag
Bruns Memorial Amphitheater
Orinda, CA / (510) 548-9666

Reviewed by [Judy Richter](#)

A snippet from the overture to **Richard Strauss'** "**Der Rosenkavalier**" opens the **California Shakespeare Theater** and **San Jose Repertory Theatre** co-production of "**The Triumph of Love**" by early 18th century French playwright **Pierre Carlet de Marivaux**. Opening at Cal Shakes with an adaptation by director **Lillian Groag**, who often uses operatic refrains, the production uses other melodies from the Strauss opera and even employs the silver rose at the end, but there are only a few similarities between the plots of the two works.

Nevertheless, Strauss works well in **Jeff Mockus'** clever sound design, which also includes birds, horses and dogs to evoke the country home occupied by two middle-aged siblings, Léontine (**Domenique Lozano**) and noted philosopher Hermocrates (**Dan Hiatt**), who apparently have renounced love in favor of a quieter, more contemplative life. Completing their household is Agis (**Jud Williford**), the youthful prince of Sparta whose ascension to the throne was blocked by a usurpation.

Into their midst comes Princess Léonide (**Stacy Ross**) of Sparta, who sits on the throne because her uncle was the usurper. Disguised as a young man, Phocion, she says she wants to study with Hermocrates. In truth, she has fallen in love with Agis and wants to restore him to the throne, but she fears he will reject her because he has been taught to despise her. She is accompanied by her lady-in-waiting, Corine (**Catherine Castellanos**), who also is disguised as a man.

The plot subsequently turns on Léonide's efforts to persuade the reluctant Hermocrates to allow her to stay. Before long, everyone in the household except Léontine knows that she's a woman, but no one knows that she's the princess. She finds she must constantly employ her wits to stay there, ultimately wooing both siblings as well as Agis. Of course, she finally reaches her goal, but not without hurting and embarrassing the siblings.

Ross is riveting as the princess, her face reflecting her dismay when one tactic doesn't work, then quickly lighting up as she comes up with another strategy. Groag's adaptation, using a new translation by **Frederick Kluck**, also has fun with one of her aliases, *Aspidistra*, which no one can remember properly. The gag is similar to and just as effective as the one in the long-running "**Beach Blanket Babylon**" in San Francisco, where permutations on Snow White include Snow Plow and Snow Job, among others.

Lozano, Hiatt, Williford and Castellanos also are terrific. However, the other two cast members, **Danny Scheie** as Arlecchino and **Ron Campbell** as Dimas, a gardener, need to tone down. Scheie, though gracefully animated, can become too hyper and shrill, while the bumpkin sight gags for Campbell need to be used more sparingly. Groag and company will have a chance to remedy these issues because the production will move to San Jose Rep in September.

Of course, **Kate Edmunds** will have to modify her handsome garden set for the indoor venue, as will lighting designer **Russell H. Champa**, but the gorgeous costumes by **Raquel Barreto** will make the transition easily. The dress that Ross wears for the finale is stunning.

This is a delightful, amusing production, one that easily bears a repeat viewing.