

Show Guide

West

Southern CA June 06, 2001

Mercadet, The Napolean of Finance

Reviewed By Hoyt Hilsman

Balzac's comedy of capitalism is delightfully presented by the Antaeus Company, under the direction of Dakin Matthews, who also performs the leading role. In this satire of both human greed and the financial system, Balzac has created the perfect hero. Mercadet, who would be quite at home among the scam artists and the financial titans of the 21st century (they often seem indistinguishable), has figured out a simple truth of capitalism: It is better to be a debtor than a creditor.

"Mercadet, The Napolean of Finance"

Theater: Ivy Substation

Location: 9070 Venice Blvd., Culver City

Phone: (818) 506-8462

Starts: June 02, 2001

Ends: July 01, 2001

And what a debtor he is. Mercadet works 24/7 at piling up debts from everyone he encounters, wheedling them with whiffs of fabulous fortune, while extorting a few more thousand francs for his own pockets. Among his victims are the puffing Goulard (John Achorn), the too-clever Pierquin (Martin Ferrero), the aged wily Pere Violette (Ralph Drischell), and Mercadet's childhood friend, Verdelin (Geoffrey Wade).

Mercadet has a family, of course, whom he uses as convenient props in his ongoing swindles. His patient wife (Mary Kay Wulf) and his pretty, withdrawn daughter Julie (Jennifer Gatti) do their best to try to calm the inevitable wake that Mercadet churns up. Even when Mercadet arranges a marriage to the Count de la Brive (Jonathan Nichols), his pliant daughter submits, despite her love for the young Minard (Scott Allegrucci).

The irony of Mercadet's plight is that he is the greatest victim of his own lies. In his enthusiasm to deceive, he finds himself diving into the black hole of deceit, along with his victims. His most recent and prominent disaster was his involvement with the mysterious Godeau. Throughout the play, Mercadet, his creditors, and his family are perpetually "waiting for Godeau." (Samuel Beckett cryptically denied that the Balzac play was the source for his famous title, but that is another story.)

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