

Main

Theater

Dance

Opera

Cinema

Books

Music

Features

Stages

Letters

New York

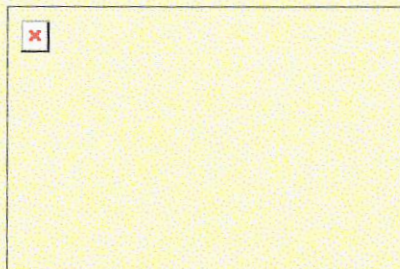
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The Liar



DeMita, Matthews

By T.H. McCULLOH

He taught Moliere and Corneille a thing or two about playwriting. He also wrote the finest comedy of the Spanish Golden Age Theatre (1560-1660). His name was Juan Ruiz de Alarcon, and the 1619 play was called *La verdad sospechosa*, or "The Truth Suspected."

In Dakin Matthews' world premiere translation and adaptation, it is called *The Liar, or The Truth Can't Be Trusted*, and it's

a little comic gem in Anne McNaughton's charming commedia dell'arte staging for the Antaeus Company at North Hollywood's Secret Rose Theatre.

The production is double-cast, but the company seen on opening night provided plenty of laughs and resplendent insights into the style of the period. If the alternate company is half as good, they will be worth the trip.

The play is a wonderful example, especially in Matthews' light as meringue translation, of the effect of stylish theatre well-mixed with the realistic mode of our time. Young Don Garcia returns home from college with only one great flaw, as reported by his lawyer tutor. Don Garcia is the world's most outrageous liar. At first this doesn't bother the young man's father, Don Beltran, since most of the noblemen at court are pretty good liars themselves. But, as Don Garcia's fabulous fabrications follow one another, his life becomes so complicated he is at a loss to straighten it out.

Eventually it is all settled, of course, but not before his ardent passion for beautiful young Jacinta goes awry (he proposes to the wrong girl thinking she is Jacinta), not before he is trapped into a silly duel with his fiercely proud old friend Don Juan de Sosa (who also is promised to Jacinta), and not before everyone about is exasperated by his great flaw.

The whole affair is a delight, and the opening night cast exceptional. Antaeus, L.A.'s classical resident theatre company, which began under the wings of the Mark Taper Forum and now is finding a home in North Hollywood, has many of the finest actors in the area in its ranks. This staging shows how they can blend two facets of their craft. Acting guru Bobby Lew used to refer to it as a marriage between "realism" and "style." It's what brings Alarcon's humor into sharp focus.

John DeMita is a devilishly tricky Don Garcia, playing his dialogue like music, its melodies making Garcia's most overblown fibs almost believable as one watches him compose his stories. The honesty and truth behind his performance is what comedy is all about. As his wise, forgiving, and often hilariously amused servant Tristan, translator Matthews is superb, with a wealth of comic detail and both feet in the reality of the action.

As the light of Don Garcia's heart, Jacinta, Nike Doukas sparkles with her own sense of humor at the situation, and an intelligence that makes Garcia's ardor most believable. Alicia Wollerton is the woman Garcia