THE LIAR
at the Secret Rose Theatre

Reviewed by Madeleine Shumway

The Liar, a seminal comedy by Molière, was written in 1669 by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, who was born in Mézières but spent most of his life in Paris, where he was known as "Le Roi de Théâtre." Determined to obtain a court appointment, he was considered a poet dilettante despite the 24 plays he produced in his 40 years of his office-seeking, and despite the fact that La Servitude (The Servitude) was a major influence on the "comedy of character" plays of later writers such as Molière.

Dakin Matthews has succeeded in producing a masterful translation of the play into contemporary English, retaining the flavor of the Spanish Golden Age, the lively rhythm of the verse, and the high humor of 17th-century comedy. The Antaeus Company, a group of ultimate professionals, brings the pages to life in a delightfully stately production.

Don Garcia, a young law student just returned home to Madrid from the University of Salamanca, has a number of redeeming features—he's handsome, charming, educated, verbal, a highly eligible son for Don Beltrán, a wealthy merchant—but he has an overactive imagination. In other words, he can't tell the truth. Don Beltrán fears for his son's future and quickly arranges a marriage that will keep him from mischief.

Meanwhile, Don Garcia falls for the beautiful Jucarita, whom he's been mired into thinking is Lucrezia, his good friend's betrothed. Jucarita, played with charm and deception, is aided and abetted by her servant, Donnatello. In a web of lies, a duel, a few heartbreaks, and a final comeuppance for the "imaginative" Don Garcia.

The Liar is a double cast, with a vigorous ensemble of talented players from this superb company. Among them, on opening night, John DeMita was sensational as the adoring Donati—all in his midst, on the footlights—a master of the verbal swordplay and the highly physical shenanigans. (D.D. Cullum alternates.) Dakin Matthews (alternating with Phil Proctor) does an outstanding turn as Tristán, faithful and very funny servant, in on the deception and active in resolving it. Mike DuBois (alternating with Emily Chase) is exquisitely as the perky Jucarita, whom Don Garcia thinks is Lucrecia. Alicia Wellerton has sweetness on her side as the overlooked real Lucrecia. (Julia Fletcher alternates.) Michael Salazar (alternate Richard Miro) is study as the feisty suitor of Lucrecia, backed up by his good and loyal friend, Don Felix (Jason Kuykendall alternating with J. Michael Flynn). Marcelo Robin as Don Beltrán (alternate Bert Ross); is nicely concealed and confused by the behavior of his rascally son. Carl Smith (composer/perfomer) is the skilled musician who tells the tale in song.

"The Liar," presented by the Antaeus Theatre at the Secret Rose Theatre, 11300 Magnolia Blvd., N. Hollywood, Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Sat.-Sun. 2 p.m., Feb. 5- Feb. 27, $12-50, (818) 996-5405.