


Don Juan

by Molière

In a new translation for Sheffield Theatres by Simon Nye

Education pack: David Wheeler



*“...I love beauty
and I’m rather good
at giving in to it...”*

26 September - 20 October 2001
A Sheffield Theatres Production

CRUCIBLE

"...Don Juan is a fantastic mixture of knock-about farce and metaphysical speculation. Molière is a subversive and it shouldn't be a surprise that Don Juan has found a more natural audience in the last hundred years than it ever enjoyed in the playwright's own lifetime."

Michael Grandage, Director.



“Like all great dramatists he makes us look in the mirror and challenges us about the way we live as individuals and as a society. And that has to be good for us, doesn't it?”

Michael Grandage, Director.

Molière Timeline (1622-1673)

- 1622 15 January - born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin to wealthy parents in Paris.
- 1536-1641 Sent to the Jesuit College de Clermont. After leaving school he studies law and practises for 6 months.
- 1642 Decides to make a career as an actor.
- 1643 Creates a stage company to be known as *Illustre Théâtre*. Performs mainly tragedy. Changes name to **Molière**.
- 1645 Joins touring company and tours south of France, acting in improvised farces in Commedia dell'Arte style (many of them adapted by Molière himself).
- 1655 *L'Etourdi* (The Blunderer) - first of Molière's plays to be staged.

Some of his 33 plays:

- 1659 *Précieuses Ridicules* - his first comedy of manners
- 1661 *L'École des Maris*
- 1661 The first of his ballet-comedies, *Les Facheux* (Popular at the French court)
- 1662 *L'École des Femmes* - attacked for its ridicule and for having indecent and irreverent passages in it.
- 1664 *Tartuffe* - a similar attack from religious quarters - the King banned its public performances. It reappeared as *L'Imposteur* but it was banned again until 1669.
- 1665 Don Juan**

Other famous plays:

- 1666 *Le Misanthrope*
- 1666 *Le Médecin Malgre Lui*
- 1668 *L'Avare*
- 1670 *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*
- 1673 Molière is taken ill on the stage of the Palais-Royal in his production of *Le Malade Imaginaire* and dies a few hours later.



Simon Nye

Before his career writing for TV began, Simon Nye worked as a translator, translating books on Wagner, Matisse and Braque. This translation of **Don Juan** is his first for the theatre.

In his late twenties he turned to writing fiction, publishing two novels. In 1990, he adapted his first novel *Men Behaving Badly* into a situation comedy. The show won a host of awards, including the British Comedy award for Best ITV Comedy and it was nominated for an international Emmy. His second novel *Wideboy* became the comedy drama series *Frank Stubbs Promotes*.

Simon's recent work for tv includes *"How do you want me?"*, *"Beast"*, *"The Railway Children"* and *"The Savages"*, and his current projects include feature films for Redwave Films and Working Title.

The Plot

Don Juan is a notorious womaniser. Although he's married to Donna Elvira, he is also after Charlotte, a peasant woman. The fact that she's already engaged doesn't prevent him from pursuing her and from asking her friend Mathurine to marry him as well! He is confronted by both women and so disguises himself as a local. To confuse matters Elvira turns up, as does her brother, Don Carlos, angry that Don Juan has upset his sister and dishonoured their family. The statue of a commander Don Juan killed six months previously comes to life, and tries to persuade Don Juan to see the errors of his ways. Is this God's punishment for his immoral life?

The Legend of Don Juan

Don Juan is a figure of Spanish origin whose amorous exploits have been the subject of a number of literary and musical works. According to the most common form of the legend, Don Juan seduces the daughter of the military commander of Seville and afterward kills her father when he seeks to avenge his daughter's honour. Don Juan later shamelessly invites the statue erected in his memory to dinner, whereupon the slain garrison chief comes alive and drags Don Juan off to Hell.

Various writers such as Corneille, Molière, Byron, Shaw, and Rostand and composers such as Gluck, Mozart, and Strauss have offered their own interpretations of the legend. Byron's unfinished epic poem is probably the most famous.

Source: The 1995 Grolier Multi-media Encyclopaedia

French and English Restoration Theatre

1. In 1642, six years before the execution of Charles I, Parliament closed down the theatres in England and, until the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, we had little theatre in this country.
2. French theatre and Italian notions of theatre architecture had a big influence on theatre in England.
3. Theatre in France, and subsequently in England, was beginning to focus more on the mechanics of scenery and spectacle.
4. Theatres began to display the *proscenium arch* style of architecture.
5. Women first began to appear on stage (a convention borrowed from the French), instead of female roles being played by boys and young men.
6. French playwrights including, Jean Racine (1639-1699) and Molière (1622-1673) had an influence in turning theatre away from classical style into more contemporary subject matter.

Do it!

Before you see the play.

Work through each heading below, making detailed notes. Then compare your thoughts and opinions with a partner.

Expectations

Title - Don Juan

What does it suggest?

What is the play based upon?

Playwright

Who is/are the writers? It is a translation. What do you expect from Simon Nye (writer of Men Behaving Badly)?

What do you know of the writers' work?

Are the writers' backgrounds significant to the play in terms of gender, culture, social class?

What skills does a translator need other than an understanding of languages?

Genre

In what historic period is the play set?

What expectation do you have of plays set in this period?

Director

Have you seen any other plays directed by Michael Grandage?

What are his trademarks?

Acting Company

Is this a permanent company?

Do you recognise any of the actors or creative team?

Venue

What type of venue is this?

What do you expect from this venue - performing area, style of set and costumes etc?

Reviews

Are any newspaper or TV reviews available?

What opinions are expressed in these articles?

Marketing

*How and where has **Don Juan** been publicised?*

What image has been used?

What does this tell you about the style of the production?

Is a particular audience being targeted?

Summarising

What do you expect the performance to be like?

Do you envisage any problems with the staging of the play?

If you have already studied the play what are you looking for in this production?

An education pack for the Sheffield Theatres' 2001 production of **Don Juan** by Molière - in a new translation by Simon Nye. The pack is designed for post-performance use (although some pre-performance work can be found in this folder's Do it!) and is aimed at students studying Drama/Theatre Studies and Literature, as well as providing a general resource for audiences visiting the production.

The pack is divided into 4 mini-booklets for easy reference and practical use and, amongst other aspects includes:

The play - including plot synopsis and Molière timeline (this booklet)

The socio-historic context and themes - mini-history of the theatre and **Don Juan** and themes of the play

Language and translation - The new translation by Simon Nye (writer of TV's Men Behaving Badly) is explored with extracts from his and a more traditional translation.

Production - the set design from *model to stage*, with commentary by Designer Christopher Oram and notes from the production meeting.

Each of the mini-booklets provide background and production-specific information and a student Do it! section.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the written contributions made to this pack by the following Sheffield teachers:

Jo Higgins of King Egbert School

Alison Jenkins of City School

Claire Pender of High Storrs School.

Please work with the pack as it best suits you; you are free to photocopy for use within your school/college/home. We hope you find it to be an interesting and meaningful resource. It is part of the theatre's ongoing programme to make theatre as accessible as possible. It would be very helpful if you could let us know what you and/or your students make of the pack. Please send your comments to:

Education Department, Sheffield Theatres, 55 Norfolk St, Sheffield S1 1DA or Email: education@sheffieldtheatres.co.uk

Best wishes

David Wheeler

Rehearsal and model set photographs: **Gareth James for 7th Heaven**

Model of set design: **Christopher Oram**

For their support I would like to thank **Michael Grandage, Simon Nye, Christopher Oram**, the **Don Juan** company, **Sheffield Theatres Education Department, Sheffield Theatres staff, Iris Associates** and **The Production Company**.

Season sponsor

Education pack sponsors



iris associates

The Production Company

The Cast

Don Juan Tom Hollander (1)

Sganerelle Anthony O'Donnell (2)

Elvira Neve McIntosh (3)

Guzman/Ragotin Francis Maguire (4)

Don Carlos Gideon Turner (5)

Don Alonso/Commander Tom Mullion (6)

Don Louis/Beggar Robert East (7)

Charlotte Lucy Briers (8)

Martha Kerry Godliman (9)

Peter Grant Gillespie (10)

Mr Sunday Timothy Kightley (11)

Director Michael Grandage

Designer Christopher Oram

Lighting Designer Hartley T A Kemp

Casting Toby Whale

Music Julian Phillips

Fight Director Terry King

Stage Manager Di Stalker

Deputy Stage Manager Kath Bools

Assistant Stage Manager Emma Cameron

Properties, scenery and costumes made in the Sheffield Theatres workshop.

