



Mic Matarrese and Michael Gotch perform in the Resident Ensemble Players' "Anything to Declare." COURTESY OF NADINE HOWATT

# Dare to laugh

UD's 'Anything to Declare' aims to tickle your fancy with a farce about – shhhhhh – sex

By Betsy Price  
The News Journal

This is the basic structure of the French farce "Anything to Declare" at the University of Delaware this weekend: a lot of zany characters running around, a lot of slamming doors, a lot of people putting on and throwing off clothes, a lot of angst about pregnancies that don't exist and a lot of cuing in the audience that they're watching a world that's not real.

So, seriously, how is this any different from the campaign for the presidency that's consumed the country for months?

"I wouldn't know," declares Mic Matarrese.

Well, of course he wouldn't. He's been terrifically busy starring in the show as Robert De Trivelin, a bridegroom who can't quite rise to the occasion on his honeymoon, precipitating a desperate attempt to initiate his new wife into the mysteries of love, before her family throws him out and marries her off to Snidely Whiplash.

The play, a contemporary translation of Maurice Hennequin and Pierre Veber's bedroom farce, is designed to make you laugh. Period.

"You're not learning more about men or women or about humanity," Matarrese says. "You're learning about how much you haven't laughed in a while."

Which, of course, cycles right back to that election.



Kathleen Pirkle Tague, Michael Gotch (center) and Stephen Pelinski act in the second production in the Resident Ensemble Players' 2012-13 season. COURTESY OF NADINE HOWATT

"Anything to Declare" is the second production in the Resident Ensemble Players' 2012-13 season. The group of professional actors is one of about 10 resident professional theaters at a university, including Yale, Harvard, Brown, UC-San Diego, Chapel Hill and the University of Tennessee, all of which operate differently.

While REP members have their own season working with UD faculty and guests artists, they also each teach a course to acting students, particularly those in the Professional Theatre Training Program, which was

## IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** "Anything to Declare," a Frrrrrench farce about sex

**WHERE:** Thompson Theatre at the Roselle Center for the Arts, 110 Orchard Road, at the intersection of Orchard Road and Kent Way, Newark

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. today, Saturday, Nov. 28, 30, Dec. 1, 6, 7 and 8; 2 p.m. Sunday and Dec. 1, 2, 8 and 9.

**TICKETS:** \$21-\$27, with discounts for students, seniors and UD faculty and staff. Buy them at [www.rep.udel.edu](http://www.rep.udel.edu), by calling 831-2204 or at the box office at the Roselle Center for the Arts, noon-5 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

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# Laugh: Play designed to give audience the giggles

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disbanded last year because of financial pressures at UD, which projected a \$25 million shortfall.

It's expected to return next year, though. The university just launched a program to raise \$1 million a year to bring in 22 students – a mix of actors and theater production specialists – for the three-year program. Because students learn by performing, the money pays for student productions, a stipend for each student and fees for guest artists such as directors and set designers.

"We are in the midst of doing everything from individual donor fundraising as well as applications to corporations and foundations and that sort of thing," says Joann Browning, deputy dean of the School of Arts and Sciences. The school spent the summer and early fall finalizing the details of the plan, and has not yet set a drop-dead date for raising the cash.

When the professional training program is in session, the students have their own season, with REP players doing bit roles, while the students do bit roles in REP productions. Over the three years of the program, the troupes begin to blend until they're all working as equals.

Matarrese graduated from the PTPP in 2007. He's done a lot of regional theater, and at the REP you have seen him play Brendan in "The Weir," Babbybobby in "The Cripple of Inishmaan," Garry in "Noises Off," Oscar in "The Little Foxes," Willie Stark in "All the King's Men," Oberon in "A



Stephen Pelinski (left) and Torrey Hanson perform in the play, set in 1912 France. COURTESY OF NADINE HOWATT

Midsummer Night's Dream," the Rev. Chasuble in "The Importance of Being Earnest," The Actor in "The Resistant Rise of Arturo Ui," Happy in "Death of a Salesman" and Brick in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

"Anything to Declare" takes place in 1912 France. The bridal

couple had been on a train, about to delve into the mysteries of marriage, when a border guard bursts into the room and demands to know if they have anything, rendering the husband unable to declare. Anything.

They return home to the bride's family, who is expecting grandchildren,



Mic Matarrese stars as Robert De Trivelin, the bridegroom, with Elizabeth Heffin in "Anything to Declare." COURTESY OF NADINE HOWATT

and shocked none are on the way. The groom, who can't overcome his problem, decides to see a professional.

But the jilted suitor has heard about his problem, dresses as a border guard and slams through all the doors in the brothel demanding to know if anyone has "Anything to Declare," which, of course, just exacerbates

the problem. (And nobody sees a John Edwards-Newt Gingrich joke in here?)

The nature of farce leads to lots of fights, falls, slaps and other stage mayhem.

All of that must be timed and executed so that the action is effective, but the players safe. Matarrese not only acts the lead; he's also the

manager of stage violence. He enjoys it because one aspect of acting he likes is the movement involved.

"There's a degree of verisimilitude that the audience has an appetite for," Matarrese says. "We see all the moves that are around today and the video games. We have a pretty high standard in terms of what we perceive as real."

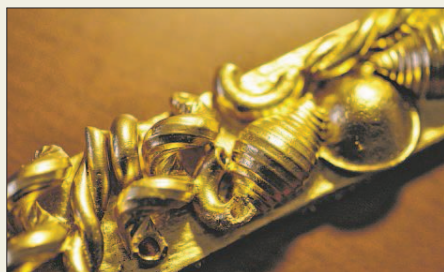
As the same time, he says, the cast has all kinds of other ethical and physical issues. They can't be bruised and banged up and still perform well.

"Some of the violence is out-and-out fake, and some of it is executed in such a way that no harm comes to the people in spite of the fact that they are getting slapped across the face," he said.

"And any number of the movements are capable of producing incredible grievous wounds." Again, with the election.

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## That's not molding. It's macaroni.



A closeup of the painted pasta that set designer Nick Embree and scenic artist Liz Breitling used to create an ornate feel for the Louis XIV-style interior.

COURTESY OF NADINE HOWATT

Ah, the versatile macaroni. You can eat it. Thread it. Or paint it gold and use it as period molding in a university production of a French farce.

For the current run of the University of Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players' production of "Anything to Declare," set designer Nick Embree needed to give some punch to the ornate home meant to evoke the splendor of a Louis XIV-style interior.

So he turned to macaroni. And orecchiette. And cellentani, gemelli and plain-old medium shells. Painted gold, the 300 pounds of pasta double as the elaborate gilded molding, giving it visual depth and complexity.

Scenic artist Liz Breitling says it took more than 75 hours to create 800 feet of the molding, which involved gluing the pasta to strips of wood, and then cutting the wood to fit.