

**THEATER REVIEW**

# High-energy show brings depth to ‘Servant of Two Masters’

**By Gail Obenreder**  
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When it comes to actors on the road, the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni has to be an ultimate authority.

In his youth, the legendary Venetian (1707-1793) ran away with a strolling company of players, studied (and periodically practiced) the law, lived in Paris as well as Venice and wrote dozens of plays and opera libretti in both Italian and French.

Early in his writing career, Goldoni decided that Moliere was his artistic model. He then set out to change Italian drama, which he did, by refining – or rather by

re-defining – the tradition of commedia dell’arte, an Italian improvisational performance style.

His plays are noted for their ingenious melding of wit, acute social observation and high comedy as they dramatize and satirize the lives and values of the emerging middle classes. But if you think this sounds a little dry, rest assured: Goldoni is also very, very funny.

The Resident Ensemble Players, the University of Delaware’s professional troupe, have enlisted the gifts of Paolo Emilio Landi, an Italian authority of another sort, for their current offering, Goldoni’s “The Servant of Two Masters.” Landi and Jeffrey Hatcher have

translated and adapted the work, and Landi directs the sparkling high-energy production, using his artistry in many fields to bring scope and depth to this well-known Italian farce.

The director winningly mixes contemporary Delaware references with classic commedia acting (masks, props and pratfalls), throws in spurious Latin quotes and puns, mashes up actors in the audience and actors as audience onstage and even brings out a dog and two horses – and one of the horses has theatre credits!

Landi’s intricate staging calls for the full-out commitment and



Carine Montbertrand as Smeraldina and Lee Ernst as Truffaldino. COURTESY OF N. HOWATT

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