

Les Liaisons Dangereuses: Love and Revenge

By Flora Lynn Isaacson

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The ensemble in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Photo: Steve Chip Brown

Porchlight Theatre Company opened their 10th anniversary season on June 19 with *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Christopher Hampton with co-directors Ann Brebner and Ken Sonkin. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* marks the 50th anniversary of Ann Brebner's arrival on the Bay Area theatre scene and her founding of the Marin Shakespeare Festival. The Festival's inaugural production was directed by Ann Brebner on the same Redwood Amphitheatre stage where *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is now performed.

The script is adapted from a 1782 novel, written in the form of a series of letters, by military strategist Choderlos de Laclos. This play by Christopher Hampton is a study in strategy, intrigue and cruelty. The plot focuses on the Marquise de Merteuil (Tara Blau alternating with Anne Darragh) and the Vicomte de Valmont (Nick Sholley), rivals who use sex as a weapon of humiliation and degradation, all the while enjoying their cruel games. Their targets are the virtuous (and married) Madame de Tourvel (Rebecca Castelli) and Cécile Volanges (Kelly Elizabeth Anderson), a young girl who has fallen in love with her music tutor, the Chevalier Danceny (Erik Rhea).

In order to gain their trust, Merteuil and Valmont pretend to help the secret lovers so they can use them later in their own treacherous schemes. A complicated unfolding of interconnected and self-serving schemes and betrayals ensues with reputations ruined and negative outcomes for all. The climax of the play boasts a sword fight between Valmont and Danceny, which is noted for its excellent choreography.

Rounding out a strong cast of supporting players includes Molly Noble as Cécile's mother Madame de Volanges, Candace Brown as Valmont's understanding Aunt, Madame de Rosemonde, Thais Harris in an exceptional performance as courtesan Émilie, and Don Wood as Azolan, Valmont's servant.

The play takes place during one autumn and winter in 1785 in various salons and boudoirs in and around Paris, which are the sumptuous rooms of pre-Revolutionary France.-Set designer Ron Krempetz gives us a turquoise background with a pink floor, containing a green square at the center with a blue diamond in the middle.-Costume designer Todd Roehrman deserves a great deal of credit for his lush, period costumes of these gloriously attired aristocrats.-

To quote co-directors Ann Brebner and Ken Sonkin, “On the surface, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* may seem like a period piece about the decadence of the nobility on the eve of the French Revolution.-But when held like a mirror up to our own times, the play offers an uncanny reflection of the dangers of corporate greed, government corruption, and an apathetic and self-interested culture, that characterizes contemporary American civilization.”

Les Liaisons Dangereuses continues (Thursday to Sunday 7:30pm) until July 11 at Redwood Amphitheatre, Marin Art & Garden Center, 30 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, Ross. Tickets (\$25 to \$30) call (415) 251-1027 or at porchlight.net