

Il Campiello is dell'Artful

IL CAMPIELLO at the Telus Studio Theatre until Oct. 25

BY CARINA COJEEN/CULTURE WRITER

If you need a break from midterm exams and papers, head down to the Telus Theatre at the Chan Centre to check out the latest UBC theatre production, "Il Campiello." Written by 18th century Italian Playwright Carlo Goldoni and splendidly produced by the UBC theatre department, it will transport you from the dreary grey of Vancouver into the colourful world of 18th century Venice.

Upon entering the theatre, the audience is launched into the mood of "Carnavale"—a time of hilarity and celebration in Venice. In addition to the playful, doll-like set and Italian music, the 11-member cast creates an atmosphere of happy chaos by bouncing around the stage, interacting with the audience and being generally absurd in the manner of Commedia dell'Arte.

Goldoni has been dubbed the "Italian Moliere" since he tried to raise the level of Italian theatre above the "theatre of masks." This play is a comedy of manners (or rather, lack thereof). It focuses on four squabbling, jealous households who live around a small courtyard in Venice, and whose already fractious lives are thrown into even more chaos when a mysterious and wealthy stranger comes to stay at the inn next door.

Goldoni presents all his characters as petty and manipulative, yet somehow you still like them in the end because they are more childlike than malicious.

The households on the square consist of four single guardians, three widows, and one strict, bookish uncle, and their children, three lovely but shallow maidens and one youthful "mama's boy." These characters defect and rejoin in constantly shifting alliances as the guardians try to marry off their charges, while the youths alternately aid or hinder their guardians' plans. And, without failure, everyone carries out his own petty rivalries.

Arriving into this malfunctioning community is a foreigner who comes to stay at the inn for the duration of the Carnavale. Immediately, the two bawdier widows start eyeing him as a potential mate for themselves, and the stranger—after a short period of being struck by the three young girls' beauty—decides he is in love with one of them. The fun and chaos escalates from there.

The production features a very strong cast, which possesses an abundance of energy and tight comedic timing. There are nearly as many leads in the play as there are characters, and all the actors are equally strong in performance.

Adding to the success of the production is the wonderful set and cleverly simple but effective costumes. The play takes advantage of the unique Telus theatre's dimensionality, allowing the set to become extremely flexible and innovative.

This production is extremely polished. The timing and pace were dead-on, and there were no discernible glitches in either acting or production—a fine tribute to the professionalism and talent of the cast and production crew.

If you want a diversion, "Il Campiello" is a perfect way to escape to 18th century Venice. Well, at least for a couple of hours.