

# THEARTS

## THEATRE

### LE MEDECIN VOLANT/LA JALOUSIE DU BARBOUILLE ★★★

By Moliere

Melbourne French Theatre, Collingwood College Theatre, until May 8

Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

MELBOURNE French Theatre has been staging French-language plays here for more than three decades. Our culture is richer for it. If quality has varied with the experience of the actors, every so often the company shows us how it should be done.

This double-bill of one-act Moliere plays – *The Flying Doctor* and *The Jealous Husband* – roars to life in a nimble, physical and fabulously funny production. Among Moliere's earliest, the works draw heavily on the vulgar caricature and exaggerated gesture of the commedia dell'arte, doubling as heady experiments in the art of ridicule he later mastered.

It's likely Moliere felt about doctors the way Shakespeare did about dogs. The rogue-hero of *The Flying Doctor*, Sganarelle (Will Tait), impersonates one to further a love intrigue. His deception neatly skewers the profession: "Hippocrates says, and Galen too, with strong reasoning

argues, that a person does not feel well when he is ill."

Tait's performance is hilarious, spicing the satirical dialogue with artificial grins, farcical antics and winning buffoonery. He's no less surefooted in *The Jealous Husband*, playing another pompous medico who solves a raging marital conflict by boring everyone into submission.

A recent arrival with impressive theatrical experience in France, director Iris Gaillard has a real gift for comedy. Her classical production, in whiteface and period costume, proceeds from deep understanding of the French comic tradition but feels utterly fresh.

With swift pace, sharp wit and elastic, cartoonish absurdity, this is a wonderful introduction to one of the world's great comic dramatists. And if your French is as dodgy as mine, don't stress – there are subtitles.