

Review: The School For Wives

[Lily Papworth](#) reviews Drama Barn's quirky comedy on married life, *The School for Wives*

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Photo Credit: Tim Kelly

Venue: Drama Barn

★★★★☆

The School for Wives follows the story of Seigneur Arnolphe, a man determined to find his perfect wife, his 'other half'. However, his methods for finding such a wife are, as we soon find out, rather unconventional. Packed with double identities, slapstick comedy and forbidden romance, *The School for Wives* proved itself to be a good old-fashioned comedy and, directed by Venetia Cook and Georgina Wilmer, certainly a very entertaining performance.

From the outset, it was clear that the cast dynamics were fantastic, and the energy on stage was consistently high. Within minutes of lights up, Arnolphe was deliberating over what defines 'a good wife' with his contemporary, Chrysalde (played by Gavin Pattison). The rapport between these two established a strong tone for the start of the play, and this was continued as Arnolphe turned to the audience for participation, interrogating, assessing and singling them out as examples of good or bad spouses. Quite humorous, I thought, until Arnolphe's finger pointed in my direction, and it suddenly became clear I was the focus of his marital judgements...

Jack Gates was, indeed, particularly compelling to watch and his portrayal of the comically jealous, manipulative Arnolphe was superb. That being said, it is particularly difficult to identify a member of the cast who was not on-point: Emma Ralph's childish yet sassy Agnes was very enjoyable to watch, as was the relationship between the two servants, Georgette and Alain, played by Sarah Warham and Matthew Edwards. And, of course, a special mention goes to JP Guerrier, whose appearance on stage as the suave Enrique certainly had spirits high in the audience. Overall – some great casting.

The set design, too, was well thought through – simple, yet effective. Its flexibility and diversity allowed the audience to get to know Georgette and Alain better, whose interesting scene-changing routine was particularly intuitive. These scene changes were also the only time music was used in the performance. A smart move in my mind, as the jazzy accompaniment transformed these unscripted moments into mini scenes themselves, which were equally enjoyable as the primary action on stage.

Overall, I enjoyed *The School for Wives* thoroughly. It was fast-paced, funny and even a little dark in places – something I always commend. I must admit, however, I had not known what to expect when I was first introduced to the play. Evidently, I was pleasantly surprised. There was not a dull moment throughout the performance, and the relentless twists and turns of the almost ridiculous plot make it hard to determine a moment I could class as my favourite. Saying that, however, the biggest plot twist was certainly surprising, and I almost couldn't believe that Arnolphe – well, I'll let you find out for yourselves.



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