

director's notes

The tensions between propriety and desire, social role and social behavior seem very distant to us in our world of the American Dream and casual Fridays. We have a tendency to believe in immediate achievements and limitless possibilities. Restoration wit, in all its playful intellectual glory, is far removed from contemporary sarcasm. Restoration love, in all its emotional intensity and performed coyness, feels far removed from modern love. The chasm between the two periods can feel overwhelmingly large and impossible to bridge.

Yet I cannot imagine a better form of theatre than Restoration comedy. Twentieth century theorists introduced us to the idea that all people serve as actors in their own lives – playing different roles depending on the circumstances and wearing the appropriate social masks to do so. Restoration men and women lived this concept in their daily lives, and their theatre reflects it. Restoration comedy is filled with sword fights (what could possibly be more theatrical than the flourish of a drawn sword?), disguises, sexual anticipation, dancing, singing, and the use of asides. Restoration comedy requires the actor to reach great highs and lows, to alter her vocal and physical work on a dime, and to have a spirit of playfulness and commitment in everything he does. Best of all, Restoration comedy acknowledges its theatricality and demands a rapport with the audience. How wonderful to have the chance to break that impenetrable fourth wall and encourage the audience to actively participate in what is going on onstage!

We have tried to create a world in which the theatricality of the period is immediately apparent and embraced; where the spirit of the Restoration can flourish without giving in to reverie and a museum-like emphasis on accuracy; and most importantly, we have tried to create a world in which you, the audience, can interact with the actors and with each other, as it is this spirit of communal creativity that draws us to the theatre in the same way that it drew Ms. Centlivre around three hundred years ago. We look forward to

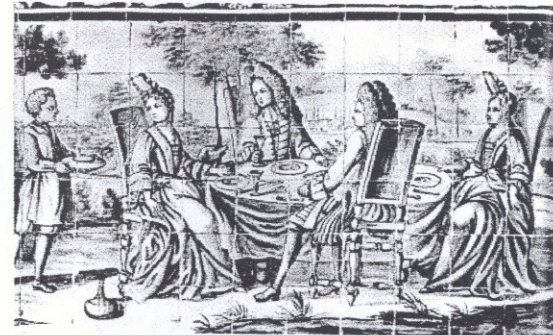
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collaborating with you and hope you will enjoy your role in our production of Susanna Centlivre's *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret*.

Notes about the setting:

Susanna Centlivre, a British playwright, chose to set *The Wonder* in Portugal. In this way she was able to explore the gender and class expectations of her society without posing a direct challenge to the patrons who were supporting her career. Centlivre refers to the oppressive patriarchal structure of Portuguese society throughout her play, and almost always contrasts it verbally with a celebration of the freedoms allowed in England. At the same time, the action of *The Wonder* is free and active, and it seems that Portugal represents a sort of romantic and fantastical other-world for Centlivre – a world in which romance reigns supreme, women ultimately have the upper hand, and men and women are allowed to shed their social masks more readily than in the Restoration court.

Portuguese architecture of the period was heavily influenced by the blue-and-white tiles of António Vital Rifarto. His tiles were ordered for the two stories of the cloister of the cathedral of Oporto between 1730 and 1734, and the 1730s saw the mass production of tiles based on French engravings in Lisbon factories.¹ The tiles are incredibly intricate, and often depict human figures in mannered poses and elaborate costumes. Yet there is something understated about the tiles due to the monochromatic coloring, a coloring that is perfectly suited for this port city.



¹ Robert C. Smith, *The Art of Portugal: 1500-1800* (New York: Meredith Press, 1968) 234-5.

