



Tartuffe

Molière (1622 -1673)

Read by:	Cast	Catalog:	DB-1261
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Tartuffe, or the Imposter, was first presented at the Versailles fetes in 1664 and was almost instantly banned by the government of King Louis XIV for several years, probably because its theme of religious hypocrisy offended the archbishop of Paris, the king's confessor and former tutor. Our man Tartuffe, charming, pious, and knowledgeable, has ingratiated himself with Orgon, a wealthy man, and his mother Madame Pernelle. They consult with him about every little thing. Before long Orgon promises his daughter's hand in marriage. The rest of the family smell a rat, however, and set a trap whereby Orgon hides under a table to observe Tartuffe attempting to seduce his wife Elmire. Sure enough, he discovers the fraud, but it is too late by then. Orgon has signed over his property to Tartuffe, who has also

purloined a hidden box of compromising letters. He attempts to have the family evicted and Orgon arrested, but when the police arrive they arrest Tartuffe instead. It turns out the king has gotten wind of the goings on and Tartuffe has a rap sheet as long as his arm. The play is composed of 1,962 alexandrines, or twelve-syllable lines, in rhyming couplets. It is considered one of the most perfect comedies ever written and the characters of Tartuffe, Orgon, and Elmire are among the greatest roles in classical theatre. The term "Tartuffe" has come to mean a hypocrite who feigns virtue, especially of the religious type; a "pretender to piety".

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known by his stage name **Molière** (January 15, 1622 – February 17, 1673), was a French playwright and actor widely regarded as one of the world's greatest writers. His works include comedies, farces, and tragicomedies and are performed at the Comédie-Française more often than those of any other playwright. Born into a prosperous family and educated at the Collège de Clermont, Molière spent thirteen years as an itinerant actor while he began writing. Through the patronage of aristocrats he procured a command performance before the King. Performing a classic Corneille play and a farce of his own, Molière was granted the use of salle du Petit-Bourbon and later the theatre in the Palais-Royal, where he met success with plays such as *The Affected Ladies*, *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives*. Royal favor brought a pension and the title Troupe du Roi to his troupe and appointment as official author of court entertainments. Though popular with the court and Parisians, Molière's satires attracted criticism. *Tartuffe's* attack on religious hypocrisy was roundly condemned by the Church, while *Don Juan* was banned from performance. His hard work took its toll on his health. In 1667 he was forced to take a break from the stage. In 1673, during a production of his final play, *The Imaginary Invalid*, Molière, suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, was seized by a coughing fit and a hemorrhage while playing the hypochondriac Argan. He finished the performance but collapsed and died a few hours later.