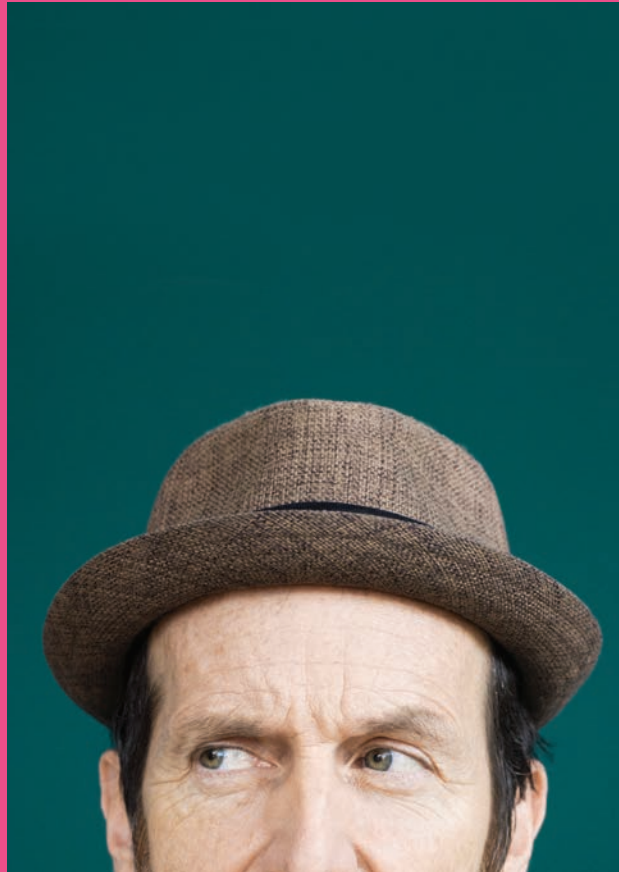


National  
Theatre



# TARTUFFE

## THE IMPOSTER

by Molière

in a new version by John Donnelly

Rehearsal Diaries



Supported using public funding by  
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ENGLAND**

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## Welcome to the National Theatre's rehearsal diaries for *Tartuffe*

These rehearsal diaries, written by the staff director of *Tartuffe*, introduce the unique process of creating, rehearsing and staging this play. At the end of these rehearsal diaries, you'll find a glossary of some of the common theatre terms which come up as part of a rehearsal process.

Through imaginative and innovative in-school, on-site and online activities, NT Learning opens up the National's repertoire, artistry, skills, and the building itself, enabling participants of all ages to discover new skills and experience the excitement of theatre-making. If you've enjoyed this background pack or would like to talk to us about getting involved in NT Learning activities, please contact us on [learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk) or **020 7452 3388**.

**Sarah Eastaff**  
Programme Manager, NT Learning  
April 2019

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**Further production details:**  
[nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk)

# The National's production

## The Company

Pernelle **Susan Engel**  
Elmire **Olivia Williams**  
Cleante **Hari Dhillon**  
Dorine **Kathy Kiera Clarke**  
Damis **Enyi Okoronkwo**  
Mariane **Kitty Archer**  
Orgon **Kevin Doyle**  
Valere **Geoffrey Lumb**  
Tartuffe **Denis O'Hare**  
Loyal **Matthew Duckett**  
Officer **Henry Everett**

### Ensemble

**Adeyinka Akinrinade, Nathan Armarkwei-Laryea,  
Fayez Bakhsh, Will Kelly, Penelope McGhie,  
Kevin Murphy, Roisin Rae, Dominik Tiefenthaler**

### Understudies

Pernelle **Penelope McGhie**  
Elmire/Dorine **Roisin Rae**  
Cleante **Dominik Tiefenthaler**  
Damis **Nathan Armarkwei-Laryea**  
Mariane **Adeyinka Akinrinade**  
Orgon **Henry Everett**  
Valere **Will Kelly**  
Tartuffe **Kevin Murphy**  
Loyal/Officer **Fayez Bakhsh**

Director **Blanche McIntyre**  
Set and Costume Designer **Robert Jones**  
Lighting Designer **Oliver Fenwick**  
Composition and Sound Design  
**Ben and Max Ringham**  
Physical Comedy Director **Toby Park**  
Company Voice Work **Jeannette Nelson**  
Staff Director **Ed Madden**

This production had its press night on  
21 February 2019, in the National's Lyttelton Theatre.

# Rehearsal diary: week one

**Staff Director Ed Madden's diary tracks the six-week rehearsal period for *Tartuffe*, beginning 17 December 2018**

Fittingly enough for a play which can be subtitled either 'The Imposter' or 'The Hypocrite', *Tartuffe* is a play of fascinating contradictions. Broad farce rubs up against satire; stock *commedia dell'arte* characters are squeezed into high-stakes corners; the household affairs of a wealthy family come to reflect on the state of the nation. Perhaps most significantly, Molière's play has long had the power both to entertain and to shock; though King Louis XIV found its 1664 premiere performance 'extremely diverting' he nevertheless banned it from public performance 'in order not to allow it to be abused by others'.

In the context of a 17th-century France with no separation of church and state, the play's interrogation of religious hypocrisy, and the manifold sins which can be hidden beneath a veneer of virtue, did not play well with prominent Catholic leaders. When the play could not be performed in public but was still being performed in private salons for the aristocracy, the Archbishop of Paris threatened excommunication not only for audience members, but for anyone who even read the text.

But what does that have to do with us? Why do *Tartuffe* now? Our adapter John Donnelly, has been grappling with this question for the past four years – his answer is the fresh, fleet-footed adaptation which now holds our company's attention in the Thompson rehearsal room.

Monday begins with Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre, and Blanche McIntyre, our director for *Tartuffe*, leading a meet and greet for the full company, introducing us not just to one another but to some 40 or so of the thousand people who work for the NT. Satisfied that everyone is lovely, we get straight down to work with a read-through of the play, which we are pleased to find is even funnier out loud than on paper and, crucially, feels urgent and immediate. Though recognisably Molière's masterpiece, John Donnelly's rendition of the play is profoundly interested in contemporary notions of power, class consciousness and social inequality; notions which hang thickly in the air in the dying weeks of a year so characterised by political unrest and uncertainty.

The rest of the week provides a chance for us to acquaint ourselves with the play and what it might require of us, safe in the knowledge that we then have a week off over Christmas to digest what we learn, alongside a surfeit of mince pies. Discoveries range



from the spatial (a drinks trolley is positioned and repositioned until we've cracked it) to the vocal (there is much discussion of accents and who might try one out); the sensible (our scripts are now gloriously typo-free) to the absurd ('well, it's a complicated idea to explain while falling over the back of a sofa' – my quote of the week, from actor Olivia Williams).

By mid-afternoon on Friday we have walked and talked through the whole play. Nothing is set or certain, but we all have a rich, shared sense of the play and its possibilities. Every so often there is a moment that I wish I could bottle – a look in Kevin Doyle's eyes the first time he has a go at Orgon's big Act One monologue, a brilliant bit of physical comedy Enyi Okoronkwo offers up as an option for one of Damis' entrances – but it is impossible to know what will stay or go from these early days of the process. That's the thrill.

# Rehearsal diary: week two

We return from Christmas to a civilised three-day week, and even though we only rehearsed for five days before the break, we reunite as if we are a company of old friends. The benefit of our process' leisurely beginning becomes clear now: we are comfortable around one another and around the play, and so are able to start work in earnest in an environment where we feel safe truly to play, explore and take risks.

Blanche takes a simple but effective attitude to scheduling, and allocates an hour of rehearsal for every page of the script. This allows time for thorough intellectual, emotional and practical investigation of each beat in the text and fosters a usefully egalitarian sense that everything which happens on stage is of equal weight and significance. As is the case in so many classic works, there are certain scenes in *Tartuffe* which have become iconic, and which some audience members will be particularly intrigued to see our treatment of, but a real virtue of both John's version and Blanche's vision is to approach every scene with fresh eyes and a commitment to political, psychological and comic detail.

Since the general structure of rehearsals – reading through the scene, having a chat about it, getting it up on its feet, and then playing around – looks set to remain fairly consistent through the next few weeks, it feels worth using these diaries to zoom in on specific elements, individuals and ideas in the room.

First off: the sofa. Rob Jones' set design situates all of the play in the luxurious living room of Orgon's enormous Highgate home, and features a spectacular sofa. This

sofa is big, this sofa is comfy, this sofa has a secret hole in its back for people to make funny entrances through; truly it is the Rolls-Royce of home furnishings.

As we put the first two acts of the play up on their feet this week, the intelligence of the sofa's placement on stage becomes apparent. It immediately locates us in a domestic setting, and provides ample opportunity to subtly paint family relationships early on, as a relaxed, communal space. The sheer size and centrality of the thing, though, also helpfully divides the room: characters can hide behind it, volley ideas and insults across it, and reach one another over it. On so many levels, it's just so smart: as a clear indicator of wealth, as a clear symbol of family, and as a site for all manner of physical comedy.

It is a testament to Rob's stagecraft, and is already being made the most of by the cast; since we are blessed with a company with uniformly excellent spatial instincts, even early drafts of blocking are helping the room to feel properly lived-in. The more effectively we can communicate a sense of this as a space in which the family feel totally comfortable, the more *Tartuffe*'s slow but steady encroachment on the room will feel like a palpable threat to their way of life. This kind of work shouldn't necessarily be apparent to audiences – if anyone leaves the play and can only wax lyrical about the sofa, we'll probably have done something wrong – but the hope is that an accumulation of such detail adds up to a rich and total theatrical experience.



# Rehearsal diary: week three

This is our first full week of rehearsal post-Christmas, and we're moving full steam ahead with getting a draft of everything up on its feet. For both her own sanity and the cast's, at the beginning of the process, Blanche provided everyone with an approximate plan for all six weeks of rehearsals, which means we all know that at the end of our fourth week we'll be having a stagger-through of the whole play. It gives the room a useful charge: we finish work on a scene with the knowledge that the next time we look at it will be in the context of a no-stops run of the entire thing.

Perhaps the highlight of the week is a voice call on the Lyttelton stage. It is a special moment for the company, which is made up both of seasoned NT performers for whom returning to this building is like coming home, and fresh faces for whom standing on that stage and looking out into that auditorium for the first time was a palpably special moment. The first thing I saw in the Lyttelton was Stephen Beresford's play *The Last of the Haussmans*, almost seven years ago, and what I remember most keenly, besides Vicki Mortimer's extraordinary design, is my awe at the sheer size of the theatre. It is funny then, standing on the stage, that so many of us remark at how intimate it feels from a reversed perspective.

Therein, I suppose, lies the challenge for our voice coach Jeannette Nelson, who spends her hour with us carefully bridging the gap between our perception of the theatre space and its challenges. Members of the company take turns running short sections of the play on stage, while the rest of us sit in the auditorium and hear first-hand how easy it is to lose ends of lines, miss consonants or not quite a catch a thrown-away delivery. None of these remain problems for long: the company are pros and quickly key in to the demands of the Lyttelton – a need for clarity of both thought and expression. We return to the room with an expanded sense of the tone and size of performance that the Lyttelton will hold, especially for a comedy such as *Tartuffe*.



Finally, this week I turn the spotlight briefly on to Susan Engel, my hero. She is the most senior member of the company and comes to *Tartuffe* having appeared in some of the most important stage productions of this and the last century: who else could boast having acted in Harold Pinter's first play (*The Room*, 1957), and the first play by a living female writer to be staged in the Olivier (*Her Naked Skin*, 2008)? Watching her put together her performance in the opening moments of the play this week was a masterclass in the art of what just works: she might only be in two scenes in *Tartuffe*, but the odds are good that she'll walk away with both of them.



# Rehearsal diary: week four

It's a week for continuing with detailed work on the play, as we return to the sketched versions of scenes we played with before Christmas. Although this feels like yesterday, it means that by mid-week we are actually re-examining moments we haven't looked at in four weeks and yielding fascinating results: some ideas, moves, inflections and bits of characterisation have lodged firm, but there are rafts of new insights, too. Our process seems to bear out the idea that both acting and directing are a combination of instinct and investigation, as we find the common ground and points of tension between our first responses to the text and what we have learned about from our close work over the past month.

Particularly useful in the room is the continued input of our director of physical comedy, Toby Park. Though the play is not the out-and-out farce some mistakenly think it to be, there are plenty of moments of comedy and a couple of proper set-pieces which call for almost choreographic attention to detail, and Toby has a great eye for this kind of comic minutiae. He just understands the mysterious science of funniness: how waiting a beat before saying a line, or looking this way rather than that, can bring the house down.

Two of my favourite sequences to watch come together are seduction scenes involving Tartuffe and Elmire, played by Denis O'Hare and Olivia Williams, both of whom have funny bones and real willingness to play and explore. It's a joy to watch Blanche and Toby work with the two of them. Blanche is ever-conscious of serving the text and making sure that we are telling the story clearly, while Toby offers up gag after potential gag and delicately shapes the comic effect of each actor's moves and responses. Denis and Olivia, and in fact all of the company, are incredibly generative and bring lots to the table for us to work with. It therefore becomes clear that for more than a few moments in the play we have three, four, five options to play with; part of the work of the final two weeks in the rehearsal room will be to settle upon which avenues to pursue.

The week ends with a stagger-through, scripts down, and prefaced by a speech from Blanche reassuring everybody that since it's essentially impossible to do any joined-up acting in a first stagger-through, nobody should worry too much. That the play feels very much on the right track, then, is a pleasure. The actors tell me that it has taught them how better to manage their journeys through the play as a whole, five-act thing; and it has certainly taught us on the other side of the table where we need to lose some time and to work harder for clarity and finesse. It is an exciting way to end the week, and sends us into the home stretch of rehearsals with a real sense of purpose.



## Rehearsal diary: week five



This is our penultimate week in the rehearsal room, and our third pass at the play, so it's a week of detail and of decisions. Up until now, every scene has existed in at least a couple of different versions, and this is the stage of the process where, whilst maintaining a sense that the play is alive and fluid and mutable, we start to hone in on the choices which we want to make up the backbone of our production.

A real virtue of the collaborative nature of Blanche's process is that these choices feel shared. Even on the occasions when she makes an executive decision, there is a communally held understanding of the process which has led to that decision – everyone's thoughts have been given time and attention, and we know that the final production will be a true combination of contributions from across the whole company. Toby Park continues to work with us to shape and sharpen the physical comedy of the show, and we also have visits from one of the composers and sound designers, Max Ringham, and lighting designer Oliver Fenwick.

I spend two and a half days away from the Thompson rehearsal room this week, to begin work with our understudy company. We have already done a read-through, and the actors have been sitting in on rehearsals for their characters' scenes so as to be a part of discussions, but this is our first real chance to get the play on its feet. The company are total pros, who have their lines down pat and a strong sense of the physical shape of each scene, which means that we can spend a decent portion of our time digging into the text rather than fretting the minutiae of blocking.

This is my first time rehearsing understudies. It strikes me that the challenge is to make sure that all members of the company are able to slot perfectly into the

production at a moment's notice, but aren't simply mimicking the performers they are covering. By the time we get to our first preview the company must be ready to go on if necessary, and once the production has opened, we will have an understudy run with full tech support on the Lyttelton stage. This, a chance to see these actors working together to make our production of *Tartuffe* their own, is one of the milestones of this job to which I am most looking forward.





# Rehearsal diary: week six

It might be our final week in the rehearsal room, but Blanche remains open to the possibility of making new discoveries, and adjustments made to various scenes early in the week have brought them to life in entirely new ways. This is not to say that we were on the wrong track before, but that intense work on a scene or character can sometimes lead you look at them in a different way. When breakthroughs come, they may feel inevitable, but are in fact the product of weeks of detailed work.

We have full run-throughs of the play on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and the cast clearly enjoy the opportunity to play their story arcs in full and to learn by doing. Each successive run is more confident and coherent than the last, and I am fascinated by the fact that this effect appears to be reached via a two-pronged approach from the cast and Blanche. My conversations with actors suggest that this is the stage at which they feel they can take a long view of their character: what's the journey, in what ways do they change and how should they play that trajectory? Meanwhile, feedback from Blanche has become more detailed and precise; in each notes' session, she proffers up dozens of tiny tweaks which, cumulatively, manage entirely to change the temperature and tone of the next run.

Increasingly, there is the sense that we are ready to be in the theatre. So much of the comedy of this play will be defined by the detail of Rob's design, the scale of the playing space and the level at which performances must be pitched as a result. We will not be using microphones in this production, which is now relatively unconventional practice, but which we believe will be of great help to the actors. The energy required to project to the back of the Lyttelton is to all intents and purposes the same energy as that required to motor along as verbally dextrous and emotionally wide-ranging play as *Tartuffe*.

Finally, this week, a paean to our stage management team: Lorna Cobbold, Helen Smith, Emily Hardy and Jonathon Harwood. First in to rehearsals and the last out, masters of scheduling and wrangling, and general founts of good sense, they are the vertebrae of our rehearsal room. As the people to whom everyone (I mean, everyone) comes with their queries and qualms, they balance the needs of the show and the company with supreme patience and good humour, and we simply couldn't have done any of this without them. Total legends.



# Rehearsal diary: week seven

## technical rehearsals

As I write this, the rehearsal room seems but a distant memory. After six weeks of rehearsals and four days of tech, the production has begun – our Tartuffe has met his public.

The technical rehearsals themselves are the calmest and swiftest I have yet been part of. Since the design locates us in one largely naturalistic room and the whole play is set over just one day, the production's tech demands are fairly straightforward, but much credit also belongs to Oliver Fenwick and Ben and Max Ringham, light and sound designers respectively.

Max introduces Oliver to me as 'the nicest man in theatre,' and he goes on to live up to that title, as well as helping to make the living room of the Highgate home we've put on stage feel as plush and sumptuous as it must for Tartuffe's critiques of privileges to land. Max's contribution, meanwhile, frequently serves to help bridge the gap between the 17th-century context of Molière and 21st-century context of our production. Music at the top of the show and in transitions between scenes manages to locate us in both periods in a way which wittily nods to the play's history without beating us around the head with it.

The great virtue of teching a production with relatively few technical elements is that it allows the actors time to familiarise themselves with the design and to ingratiate their characters with the physical world of the play. The sofa, the fireplace, the grand entrance doors, the hidden

passageways and traps, all must feel not only coherent to this world, but second nature to the characters who live here. We also have to adapt to playing on a raked stage, which poses particular challenges for those in high heels, and of course to what it feels like to play to a 900-capacity auditorium.

Speedy progression through the play's five acts mean we have time for two dress rehearsals in the week, which Blanche notes assiduously and which the cast clearly learn a lot from and between. We had spoken about the scale and tone of performance required by the Lyttelton, but being here reveals still more about the space, such as certain sweet spots, the benefits of playing downstage when possible and the level of projection required when turning away from the audience. It is a great relief that it never feels as if the show is getting away from us – we are on top of it and getting better at giving it what it needs every day.

Saturday night. An audience arrive and pack out the theatre, and the first performance unfolds.



# Theatre glossary

## **Meet and greet**

Usually held on the first day of rehearsals, the meet and greet is a chance for the company and production team to meet everyone who is involved in the production as well as staff from marketing, learning, fundraising, etc. The director – and sometimes the writer – may take this opportunity to explain a bit about their vision for the production.

## **Round the table / table work**

Some directors like to start rehearsals by reading through the script, and getting an understanding of the play, characters and setting without adding movement or blocking.

## **Blocking**

Working out where actors should stand or move on stage, and at what point.

## **Put on its feet**

The point in rehearsals where the company start to add in blocking and try out movement for scenes. Some directors like to put a play ‘on its feet’ from the very start, and work out the intention of the play and the characters at the same time as the movement.

## **A run**

Rehearsing each scene of the play in chronological order, without interruption. Runs help directors and actors to see which parts of the production may need more attention or reworking. The first run-through of a play is often referred to as a ‘stagger-through’, as there are usually delays and mistakes.

## **Off book**

Once an actor has learnt their part, they no longer need to use their script in rehearsals and are described as being ‘off book’.

## **The book**

This is another name for the script. A stage manager who is ‘on the book’ will be in the wings of the stage, ready to help any actor who may have forgotten a line – they are also known as the ‘prompt’.

## **Act**

The separation of a play into different sections, which in turn are sometimes sub-divided into scenes.

## **The space**

The area in which the work is taking place. This term can refer to both the rehearsal room and the theatre stage.

## **Staff director**

The National Theatre uses staff directors rather than assistant directors. Staff directors have a variety of jobs, depending on the production and the director they are working with. They can help with background research

for rehearsals, lead improvisations and act as a liaison on behalf of the director. Once a production has had its press night, the director steps away from the production and the staff director takes over. The staff director rehearses the company at ‘bring back calls’ and also rehearses the understudies.

## **Bring back call**

The National Theatre operates a ‘rep’ system, meaning that a production will not be playing every day and a company may have a break every other week or so. A bring back call is a short rehearsal on the day when the company return from having a break. The staff director normally holds a line run with the company, and rehearses in more detail complicated scenes, movement sequences or fights.

## **Rehearsal call**

The stage manager will work out a day-by-day rehearsal schedule for a production, in consultation with the director. The rehearsal call sets out the scenes that are being worked on that day, and the actors or production team who are needed, and when.

## **Ensemble**

A company of actors or performers where the emphasis is on collaborative group work.

## **Company**

The cast, production team and other staff associated with the show.

## **Understudy**

An actor who learns the role of another member of the company so that they can perform that part in the event of injury, illness or scheduled absence.

## **Actioning / intentions**

A way of approaching a text, which some actors and directors like to use. Each line is assigned a transitive verb, which may help the actor to explore ways of delivering that line and uncover the meaning behind what their character is saying or trying to achieve.

## **Stanislavskian**

Relating to Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian theatre practitioner usually associated with method acting.

## **Beckettian**

Relating to playwright Samuel Beckett, whose work is associated with minimalism.

## **Alexander technique**

A system designed to promote healthy movement and posture. Named after its creator Frederick Matthias Alexander.

# Theatre glossary (continued)

## Upstage

The area at the back of the stage furthest from the audience.

## Downstage

The area at the front of the stage closest to the audience.

## Improvisation

Action taken by an actor(s) that is unprepared or unrehearsed. During the rehearsal process this is often led by suggestions from the director for the purposes of exploration and discovery. During performance improvisation is often used by actors to cover a mistake or accident on stage.

## Beat

In the script a playwright may use the term 'beat' to denote a pause or a shift in pace or intention in the play. In rehearsal, the term is often used to describe a particular moment or event on stage. It can also be used to describe a unit of time.

## Line run

The company say their lines without adding movements. Line runs help actors to feel confident that they know their words before going on stage. Sometimes line runs are done at speed, which can really test how well actors know their roles.

## Model box

A scale model of the set, used by the director and designer to work out how each scene could look. For the acting company, model boxes help them to visualise where they will be standing on stage and the world their character is living in. Carpenters, production managers, scenic artists and prop-makers will also study the model box, to get an idea of textures and finish on the set, as well as the overall look. Model boxes can also help to flag any issues with elements of staging before they are made.

## Fit up

The set is assembled on the stage.

## Get in

The set, props and costumes are brought to the stage, ready for technical rehearsals.

## Technical run

Running through the play setting all technical cues, including lighting, sound, set changes and automation. This is an opportunity to practice scene changes, characters' entrances and exits, costume changes, and for actors to get used to being on the set.



## Dress run / dress rehearsal

A dress rehearsal is a chance to pull together all elements of a production, including sound, lighting and costume, and work through the play as though it is a performance.

## Previews

Before a production has its press night, it normally has a couple of preview performances. Productions can still change right up to press night, and it is during previews that the company and director get to see how audiences respond to the production, and they may rework sections accordingly.

## Press night

The night the critics see the production before reviewing it.