

# Les Liaisons Dangereuses

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OP THEATRE CRITIC

Frederic Wood Theatre (UBC)  
Until February 2  
For tickets call (604) 822-2678

In a game of deception and revenge, how far would you be willing to go to win? That is the question Christopher Hampton asks in his cold-blooded comedy *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. The answer—as far as it takes.

Set in pre-revolutionary France,

*Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is the story of La Marquise de Merteuil (Jennifer Clement) and Le Vicomte de Valmont (Scott Bellis), two ex-lovers who delight in each other's sexual exploits and scandals. Bored of his embarrassingly easy conquests, Le Vicomte de Valmont challenges himself by setting out to seduce La Presidente de Tourvel (Sharmin Mackay), a married woman who openly prides herself on her unwavering virtue. The seduction becomes entangled with La Marquise de Merteuil's own plot against an ex-lover.

Together, the two fight a war of debauchery and revenge, using the innocent as their weapons.

Clement's portrayal of La Marquise de Merteuil is absolutely chilling. She hides her cold, calculated deceptions under a veneer of docile femininity. She uses the few advantages of her sex to dominate everyone around her. As Le Vicomte de Valmont, Bellis balances an unsettling mixture of charm and viciousness. His lewd mannerisms confuse his victims; they don't know whether to run in terror or scream with

pleasure. Together, Clement and Bellis are a wonderfully disturbing pair, both despicable and admirable.

Performances from the rest of the cast are mixed. Mackay undercuts the virtue of La Presidente de Tourvel by overplaying her righteous indignation, taking away any sympathy she might receive for being an unwitting victim of Le Vicomte de Valmont. Cecile Volanges (Katie Murphy), a young beauty fresh from the convent who is also debauched by Valmont, plays up

her innocence to the point of stupidity. Emilie, one of Valmont's courtesans is delightfully handled by Jessica Clements. Naomi Wright is equally fun as Madame de Volanges, Cecile's over-protective, prim mother.

*Les Liaisons Dangereuses* reveals a dark side of human nature that both disgusts and fascinates. Its morally chaotic plot and sexually deviant characters form an engrossing story. As Director Fran Gebhard explains, "It's like watching a car crash—we can't avert our eyes."

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