

## **NCC's modernized "Mandrake" has its moments**

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### **Abstract:**

*"The Mandrake," a bawdy farce that Florentine statesman and politician Niccolo Machiavelli premiered in 1520, was updated with raucous rock music and raw contemporary language for Northampton Community College's recent production.*

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### **Full Text:**

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"The Mandrake," a bawdy farce that Florentine statesman and politician Niccolo Machiavelli premiered in 1520, was updated with raucous rock music and raw contemporary language for Northampton Community College's recent production.

Director Laura Johnson used a translation by actor Wallace Shawn ("My Dinner With Andre") and tapped the composing skills of her husband, Paul Salerni, for an original score.

But the nods to modern sensibilities notwithstanding, the play was entertaining largely for its 500-year-old observations about human nature, greed and hypocrisy.

Pleasing Renaissance-styled motifs clashed with pounding rhythms that for all their energy seemed dull, and quickly became annoying. However the bluesy, Billie Holiday-style number "How Sad," with Nicki McFarlane on lead vocal, stood out.

Justin Bradford adequately filled the lead role of Callimaco as a goofy bumbler, and Nate Black was humorous as rich old man Nicia.

But Brad Shook as the crafty Ligurio and Brian Wendt as the borderline homosexual Brother Timothy were electric. Wendt's bit with Jillene Zander's lusty widow was hilarious.

The mostly female chorus responded to the characters by interjecting bits of sarcasm that often seemed ad-libbed, but it made for lots of fun.

Much of the play was over-the-top, heavy on cheap sex jokes and coarse vernacular.

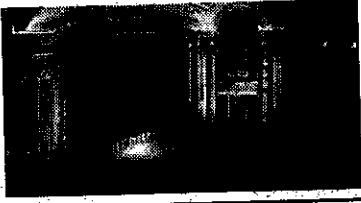
But despite building to a fevered pitch, it ended not surprisingly, but mundanely.

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Len Righi, Film/Music Editor

# Machiavelli's 'Mandrake' at NCC

## THEATER



Northampton Community College presents "The Mandrake," a farce written by Niccolò Machiavelli in the 16th century, at 7 p.m. April 4, 5, 10 - 12 and at 1 p.m. April 9 in the Lab Theatre, Northampton Hall.

The play, directed by Laura Johnson, takes place in Florence during the Italian Renaissance with a cast of comical characters that include an aspiring young dandy, an old husband with a virtuous young wife, a less than competent scholar, a corrupt friar, and an opportunistic bootlicker.

"The play addresses issues of human nature that are very recognizable to us today, such as lust, pettiness, greed, ambition and corruption," explains Johnson. "It is remarkable how contemporary the play remains," she says.

Johnson has directed numerous plays for Northampton Community College. She has directed at The Chicago Lyric Opera, Lehigh University, Harvard University, and the Opera Theatre of Lucca in Tuscany, Italy.

The cast and crew includes NCC students Justin Bradford, Aaron Coyle, John Quigley, Brad Shook, Leanna Talotta, and Brian Wendt, all of Bethlehem; Nicholas DiPasquale, Rafael Figueroa, and Lindsey Piscitello of Easton; Jason Freeby of Bangor; Sarah Harding of Nazareth; Maggie Leyden of Doylestown; Laura Jean Smith of Birdsboro; Giovanni Garcia of Stroudsburg; Nathan Black of Allentown; Nicki McFarlane of Whitehall; Jillene Zander of Riegelsville; Bernadette Caccese of Alpha; Paul Decker of Washington, and Tammy McQuaid of Phillipsburg.

Tickets for the play are free, but a donation of canned goods for a local food bank or a contribution to the NCC Actors' Scholarship Fund is requested. For tickets, call NCC at 610-861-5091, or tickets@northampton.edu. Reservations are strongly recommended, since performances do sell out. NCC is at 3835 Green Pond Rd., Bethlehem.