

# Blue Ridge

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Flat Rock Campus

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## Blue Ridge Community College Presents 'A Totally '80's' School for Scandal [www.brccschoolforscandal.com](http://www.brccschoolforscandal.com)

*By Katie Winkler, Blue Ridge Community College English Faculty*



Richard Brinsley Sheridan's classic farce School for Scandal is open for business as Blue Ridge Community College's Drama Department presents its spring production, beginning Thursday, April 22, and running through April 25, in the Patton Auditorium at the Flat Rock Campus.

Sheridan's comedy of manners may have been written to expose the penchant for petty rivalry and lascivious slander of 18th Century British society, but Director Jennifer Treadway sees the parallels to a more recent time. "This is a comedy about society and how ridiculous it becomes when people get carried away with scandal," she says. "It's over the top, so it's well-played by setting it in another time that had the same characteristics, along with truly ridiculous hair, clothing and makeup-naturally, I think of the 80's."

Despite the 1980's setting, Treadway also hopes audiences will relate Sheridan's words to our own time. "This play is about gossip," she says, explaining our fascination with people like Jesse James and Sandra Bullock, along with, Lindsay Lohan, Nicole Ritchie, and others who are celebrities just because they're rich, and how our society wants to know everything about them. "It's a form of escape," yet by laughing at the hilarious antics of these superficial socialites, we find a weapon against their behavior.

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Kai Elijah Hamilton, who plays the outrageous dandy Sir Benjamin Backbite, agrees. "A comedy of manners has a way of taking the harm out of something very harmful." Hamilton, whose character mimics the 80's MTV icon, Boy George, is also enjoying the director's change of setting. "I think it was a brilliant idea for Jennifer to take the flamboyancy back then and to put in all the flamboyancy of the 1980's added to it, like history repeating itself." Hamilton also wrote and filmed the trailer advertising the show, complete with all the cast in full '80's regalia, scandalously passing a note at the local roller rink.

BRCC graduate and returning student, Erin Carter, who plays the part of Moses, also sees the updated setting as a plus. "I think this play is going to hit home because the 80's were so over the top and that's the way our society is now-'Here's what you should look like and what everyone should be like.'" Carter is particularly drawn to her character of Moses because she does not fall prey to the foibles of such a fickle society. "Moses is there to do business," says Carter. Unlike so many of the other characters, "she's a mystery."

Z. Joesph Guice, the drama department's artist-in-residence who plays the conceited and deceitful Sir Joseph Surface, also appreciates the director's approach. "I love the '80's," he says with a smile, "and I love the added visual elements" audiences will enjoy during the show. However, Guice admits the challenges of the production, especially after last semester's leading role of Macbeth. "I like to play serious roles," says Guice, "so I enjoy the challenge of playing in this over-the-top comedy. It is a major switch. Even the language is harder to memorize than Shakespeare."

Despite the updated setting and some cutting of the original five-act play, Treadway has kept intact the witty dialogue of the original because without the Sheridan's brilliant use of language, the satire would lose much of its greatness and its original intentions. The play was first performed in Sheridan's own theater on May 8, 1777, one year after the beginning of the Revolutionary War that he would later oppose in parliament and only five years after fighting two senseless duels over insults to his fiancée, thrust upon him, he felt, by a society that fed on scandal. The second of these duels was not the elegant engagement of two gentleman swordsmen, but a beating with a broken sword so severe that it took the 22-year-old Sheridan eight weeks to even begin to recover.

Sheridan did not soon forget the bitter lessons he learned and forged a weapon not so easily broken. Sheridan's brilliance lies in how he takes the painful treatment he and his loved ones endured, turning it into a rapier of words, slicing with such a whisper-thin blade that perhaps only an elite few of his time were aware of being sliced to pieces while laughing themselves silly.

Like all great satirists before and after him, including the great Oscar Wilde, Sheridan deftly satisfies not only the ignorant masses yearning for bread and circuses, but also those who seek deeper, more meaningful fare. Sheridan's farce is more than it seems. For those who can bear it, the play strips away pretense and shows us who we really are-the deceitful, the sly, the ambitious, the cruel, the pompous, the proud, the gossiping, privileged hordes, while at the same time revealing who we could chose to be-the innocent, the kind, the generous, the honest, the true.

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Despite the hilarious twists of its plot and zaniness of its characters, Sheridan's masterpiece is at its heart an immortal story about mistaken identities, misdirection and miscommunication, both intentional and unintentional, triumphantly overcome by true friendship and enduring love, not as dramatic as all the scandal-mongers would wish perhaps, but infinitely more satisfying.

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School for Scandal by Robert Brinsley Sheridan will be performed April 22-24 at 8:00 p.m. and April 25, at 2:30 p.m. All performances will be in the Patton Auditorium at the Flat Rock Campus. Cost for the show is \$5.00 for students, faculty and staff, \$7.00 for the general public.

For more information or to reserve tickets

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