

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (aka Molière) wrote of his work, "One wants these portraits to be lifelike, and you haven't accomplished a thing if you don't make the audience recognize the people of your time." It was sometimes something of a sport for the audience to guess at whom specifically he was poking fun from play to play. In *The Learned Ladies*, in fact, he personally lampoons two of his contemporary poets. But you don't know those poets, and you are not members of the French court of the 17th Century. So in order to answer Molière's call to arms, I started with the ideas, characters and arguments that are still so very familiar to us several hundred years later: What is the role of women in society? Are family and career mutually exclusive? What is the role of knowledge? Who is the arbiter of taste? Should man be ruled by the mind or the body? What is real? What is truth? What is love? It was with these universal questions in mind that I embarked on the daunting task of moving *The Learned Ladies* from 1672 France to 1939 New York. I chose that time for several reasons. The 1930s are close enough to us to be recognizable, but far enough away to allow us a common reference point for style and etiquette, propriety and society, larger-than-life situations and heightened emotions. On the upward swing out of the Great Depression and into the second World War, the 1930s are, for me, iconically American. Possibilities, knowledge and technology were exploding, social issues were bubbling, and women were taking the world by storm—particularly in Hollywood. With an eye to women like Katherine Hepburn, Babara Stanwyk, Rosalind Russell and the lucky fellas who played opposite them, I set out to bring Molière in line with those classic screwball comedies... and found that it was a natural fit. In this delightful play, we find a bevy of characters who operate in absolute certainty—they KNOW who they are, they KNOW what is important and they KNOW that they are unequivocally right. Indeed, "know" is by far the most commonly used word in the script. So Molière asks questions, the characters believe they have the answers, and you? Well, you get to judge for yourself.