



**TOUR DE FARCE:** (left to right) Greta Lee, Mark Rylance, Joanna Lumley, David Hyde Pierce in *La Bête*.  
Photo: Joan Marcus

## *Theater Review*

# Mark Rylance & company are brilliant in the hilarious *La Bête*

### *La Bête*

Written by David Hirson

Directed by Matthew Warchus

Music Box Theatre

239 West 45th Street

(212-239-6200), [www.Labetetheplay.com](http://www.Labetetheplay.com)

By David NouNou

Babbling has never sounded more hilarious than it does in the first half hour of the opening monologue in the revival of David Hirson's 1991 Oliver Award-winning farce *La Bête*, spewed by Mark Rylance's playwright, Valere. Rylance's marvelously ridiculous rant is literally a nonstop flow of words in rhyming couplets, with hardly a breath taken in between. For Valere is a boorish, self-absorbed, crude, crass clown, and represents mediocrity at its basest. And as portrayed by Mr. Rylance, it is all done with absolute flamboyant brilliance as he spews verbal nonsense, food, and flatulence with aplomb. Only an actor of such genius can pull off a vile, despicable, repulsive character and turn him into a 21st-century everyman. Rylance's performance is likely going to be the most-talked-about of the fall season.

At the opposite end of this spectrum is David Hyde Pierce's Elomire. He has the more difficult task, as he stands for intelligence, virtue, sensibility, is slightly dull, and represents the 21st century man of extinction. Set in 17th century France, both men have been commissioned by the Princess (Joanna Lumley) to work together to elevate and enhance each others' work. One is a hack, the other is an intellectual. Just how are these two supposed to come to terms in working together? Herein lies the dilemma, and much of the show's wry humor.

It is easy to see why, when originally produced in 1991, *La Bête* failed to find an audience, but now seems it was ahead of its time. Under Matthew Warchus' deft direction, presented in 2010, it is a perfect metaphor for our modern society. In an age where reality TV is rife with mediocrity, where celebrities are born overnight, from housewives in Atlanta or New Jersey, in which spray-tanned, hot-tubbing bimbos and guys with six-pack "abs" pass off as instant celebrities, the playwright has answered the question, "Who will ultimately win?" and the dilemma.

In addition to Mr. Rylance's exquisite performance, special mention has to be made of David Hyde Pierce for bringing his character to life. As written, Elmoire (an anagram of Molière, of course) is stiff and

arch, but Mr. Pierce imbues him with style and grace. The elegant Ms. Lumley, best known for her portrayal of chain-smoking, booze-swilling fashion magazine editor Patsy Stone on the classic 1990s BBC Britcom “Absolutely Fabulous,” makes a welcome debut on Broadway, and one cannot forget the exquisite set by Mark Thompson. Kudos go out to everyone involved with *La Bête*, one of the fall’s must-see shows.

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## Broadway Listings

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'BETE' ON LAUGHS: (left to right) David Hyde Pierce & Joanna Lumley in *La Bête*.

Photo: Joan Marcus



**LA BÊTE**

Mark Rylance gives a virtuoso performance as playwright Valere in this Broadway revival of the 1991 Olivier Award-winning play by David Hirson, set in 17th century France. Mr. Rylance’s 30-minute, nonstop monologue is a gleeful mix of rhyming couplets and nonsensical humor and mayhem. David Hyde Pierce’s character Elmoire (an anagram of Molière, of course) is stiff and arch, but Mr. Pierce imbues him with style and grace. The elegant Joanna Lumley, best known for her portrayal of booze-swilling fashion magazine editor Patsy Stone on the 1990s BBC Britcom “Absolutely Fabulous,” makes a welcome debut on Broadway as the Princess. With clever direction by Matthew Warchus, *La Bête* is one of the fall’s must-see shows.

MUSIC BOX THEATRE, 239 West 45th Street, (212-239-6200).

[www.LaBetetheplay.com](http://www.LaBetetheplay.com)

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