

THE BOARDS

TARTUFFE TIMES TWO

Matthew Broderick and André De Shields have both undertaken Molière's con-man character. They feel he has a few things in common with a certain orange President.

By Henry Alford

December 1, 2025

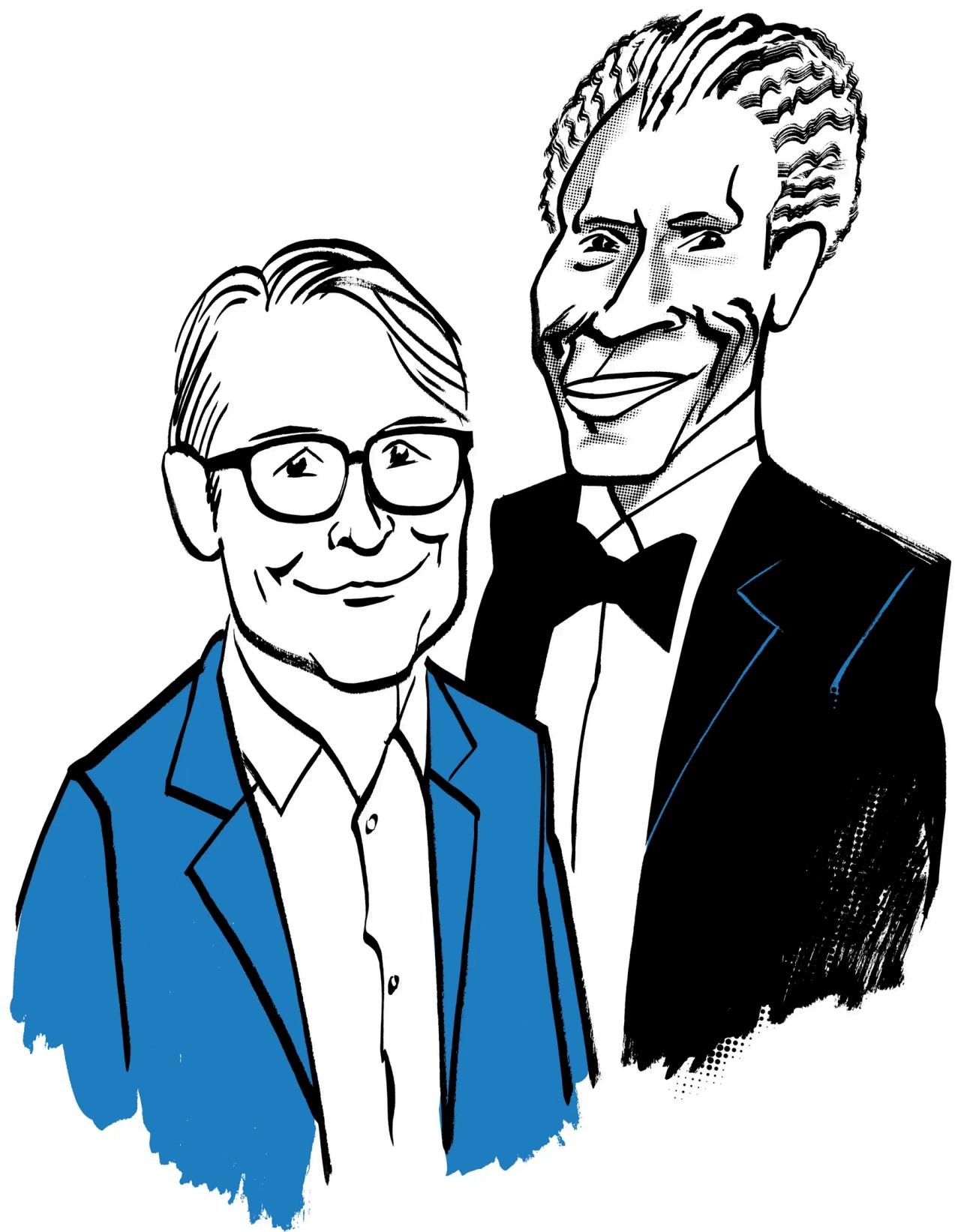


Illustration by João Fazenda



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Good afternoon and welcome to Con Con, the convention for swindlers, mountebanks, and the people who love them. Joining us today are two actors, André De Shields and Matthew Broderick, who, in separate productions, have recently played or are just about to play Tartuffe, the falsely pious scam artist at the heart of Molière’s 1664 comedy of the same name. Today’s Con Con session is being held in the conference room of the Greenwich House Music School, which conveniently has a patio, should the two conventioneers’ theatrical rivalry give way to name-calling and bitch-slapping.

De Shields arrived first, wearing a buffalo-plaid toque and a mien of utter gameness. (“Let’s talk about it, let’s talk about it!” he said.) Then came a sheepish Broderick, who’d walked over from his town house nearby, where he’d been learning lines for his turn as Tartuffe, at New York Theatre Workshop. The gentlemen, though fans of each other’s work, struggled to remember the occasion on which they’d met, in 2022—until De Shields recalled, “It was the birthday of, uh, argh . . .”

Broderick, who had on a nubby blue sweater, called out, “Harvey Fierstein!”

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Once seated, Broderick turned to De Shields, whose portrayal of Tartuffe, at the House of the Redeemer, featured preacher-style oration and a hip-gyrating cover of “Feeling Good.” “I’m ready for any tips,” Broderick said. De Shields put forth the idea that Tartuffe, a charlatan who inspires the gullible patriarch Orgon to vouchsafe both his home and his daughter’s hand in marriage, is not a man but a spirit or an extraterrestrial.

Broderick did not disagree. “It seems like he can be whoever he wants to be,” he said, “depending on who he’s talking to.” Former Broderick roles—Ferris Bueller and Professor Harold Hill—sprang to mind.

The talk turned to a certain Bible-hawking President. While Broderick’s portrayal of Tartuffe will not be informed by said President, De Shields’s production was billed as “an exorcism of hypocrisy.” “When I sing ‘Ave Maria’ as Tartuffe, the audience is, like, ‘What?! No!’ They object,” De Shields said. “But I’m trying to get their goat. I want to know how long is it going to take for you to notice that Trump is fucking you over. Tartuffe is doing expertly what Trump thinks he has a talent for.”

Broderick asked if De Shields’s audiences indeed spoke aloud. De Shields said, “The Baptists do. The Episcopalians don’t.”

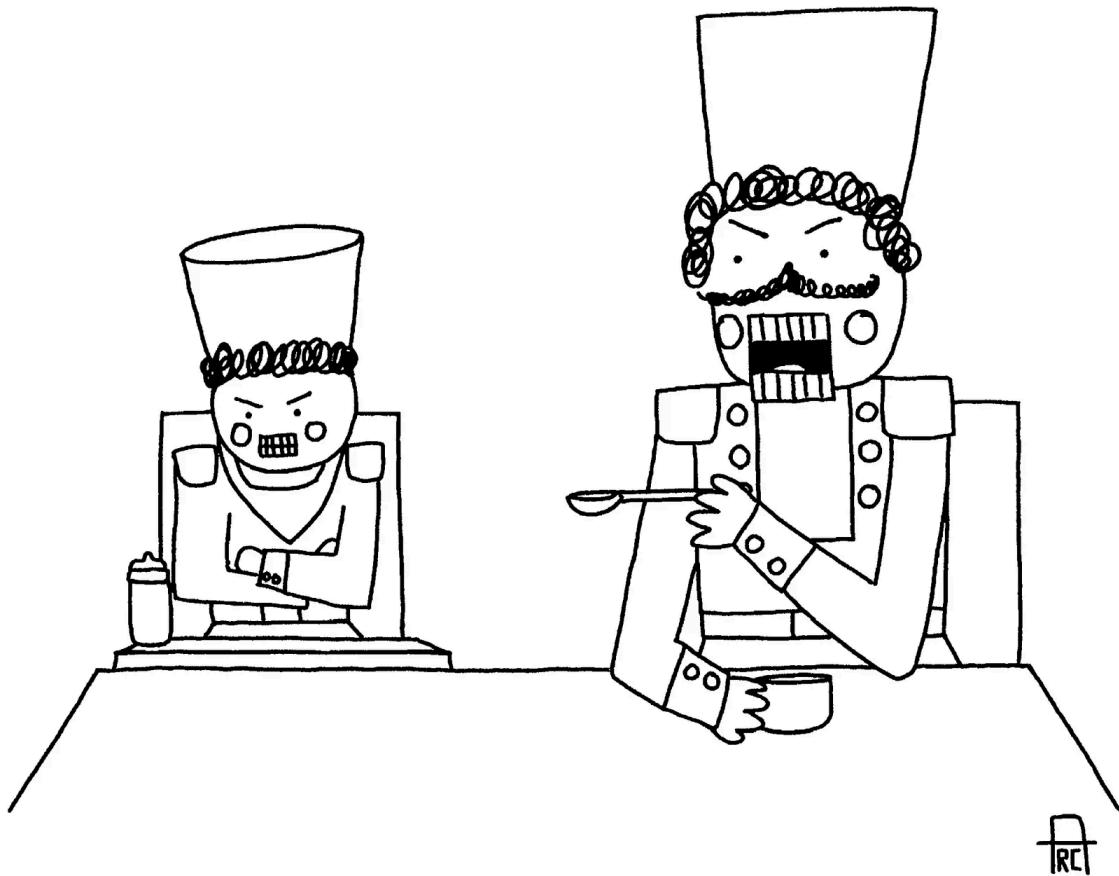
The two actors discussed a description of Tartuffe given in the play by Dorine, the maid. “In our translation, by Ranjit Bolt, Dorine says, ‘How could anyone be attracted to you? There’s so much flesh—it’s just hanging off you,’ ” De Shields said.

Broderick countered that, in his version, adapted by Lucas Hnath, “she just says I have ‘wrinkly buns.’ ”

“That’s easy enough to achieve, wrinkly buns,” De Shields said.

Broderick: “True, I think I can manage that.”

Had the two actors had run-ins with con men off the stage? “Who hasn’t?” De Shields asked.



“Don’t make me come over there and activate your mouth-opener thingy.”

Cartoon by Amanda Chung



Broderick specified one source of flimflammery in his life: “Children.”

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De Shields added, “Company managers, general managers, producers, fellow-actors.”

Did the two Tartuffles follow the story of Anna Delvey, the Russian-born scammer who bilked various New Yorkers out of their savings in the twenty-tens? Murmurs of recognition. What did they make of the fact that, once Delvey was under house arrest in the East Village, she started hosting parties, and, as *Avenue* magazine put it, “the very social circles she lied to were now lining up to get into her house”? De Shields suggested, “They’re trying to figure out why they’re such easy victims.”

Broderick said, “It seems like a relative of cults. People stay in them no matter what.” Molière’s play indicts Orgon’s credulity and Tartuffe’s deceit equally.

As he sipped a cup of tea, Broderick idly twisted a napkin into a log shape. He looked at it and said, “I dreamed about a reefer!,” quoting a lyric from Fats Waller’s “Reefer Song,” which De Shields had sung in the seventies in “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” a show Broderick saw and loved as a teen-ager.

De Shields showed Broderick a photo of his Tartuffe costume—a floor-length red cassock worn with sunglasses and sparkly bling.

“Man!” Broderick, slightly stricken, said. “I’ll be in a simple black outfit, like a priest.”

Confab over, the two men prepared to head home—De Shields to Hell’s Kitchen, Broderick to his couch, where he said he would clutch, but probably not open, his script. But first they wanted to discuss whether Tartuffe is the Antichrist. “If you read about the Antichrist from the Christian point of view,” De Shields said, “this is the most sexy, attractive, irresistible man—so everyone follows his lead, right? That’s the same reason that Christians today talk about the gift from God that Trump is. Do you know that Christians believe that he is . . .”

“Yeah,” Broderick said. “That’s why the bullet missed him.”

“Yes, and all that,” De Shields said, waving his hand. A beat. “But he’s not good-looking enough to be the Antichrist.”

“Careful,” Broderick said. “He’ll run you out of the country.” ♦

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