

REVIEW: 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum'

By Regina Belt-Daniels - Shaw Media Correspondent
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If a joyous evening of an entertaining, albeit dated, classic musical is in your theater sights, then "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is your ticket.

Director Lauren Rawitz keeps this Forum's pace moving with an extremely talented and energetic ensemble of twenty and an unseen eight piece orchestra led by Kailey Rockwell. Forum is part vaudeville, part comedic Shakespeare with chases, mistaken identities, satire, double entendres, plot twists, and a lot of hanky-panky.

Inspired by the writings of Roman playwright Plautus, with a book by Larry Gelbart and Burt Shevelove and a score by Stephen Sondheim, it's a theater centerpiece.

The plot is simple: Ancient Rome, three prominent households....the bawdy, yet crafty Roman slave Pseudolus wants his freedom. His young master, Hero, wants to marry Philia,

the girl next door in the house of courtesans (aka ill repute). Slight wrinkle: she's already been sold to the very soon to be arriving great Roman captain Miles Gloriosus.

Bryan J. Wlas' choreography may seem perfunctory at times but it is simply effective and we get kick lines! The colorful set by Robert Pinta displays the three homes with much distinction and attractiveness and is a great palette for Aliceson Hackett-Rubel's whimsical costumes (best illustrated by the troupe of courtesans who wear their costumes exceedingly well.)

An audience favorite, the charming Tommy Bullington as Pseudolus knows how to employ shtick. He's also the hardest working actor in a show that requires quite a lot of physical comedy that I've seen in awhile. You will constantly root for him despite his schemes and mishaps.

Adam Ross Brody and Maddy Kelly as Hero and Philia are adorable as the lovestruck couple and have a sweet chemistry; their counterparts, Hero's parents Senex and Domina are exquisitely played by Austin Nelson Jr. And Melissa Crabtree (and boy can she hold a note). The same admiration must be given to Teddy Gales as the greedy Marcus Lycus and wayward Bob Sanders as Erronius.

The ensemble of proteans/soldiers and courtesans are very impressive performers and dancers. They are all memorable-just sensational all. Timing makes a farce successful and this cast delivers.

As with every show, there are standouts. Hysterium, as portrayed by the fluid William Marquez, is a scene stealer. His facials and spot on takes are delightful registers of anxiety and hysteria. His role in the funeral sequence alone elicits continued laughter.

The great Roman captain to whom Philia has been portrayed is deliciously enacted to perfection by Erik Dohner. He swaggers, he boasts, he preens, and has a magnificent operatic baritone voice.

Not surprisingly, 57 years later, Forum continues to be performed all over the world-largely because it does have "something familiar, something peculiar, something for everyone". With allowances for an appreciation of Forum's theatrical history (written in 1962), I do have to confess I was slightly uncomfortable with the females characters, stereotypically either harpy or objects for men's pleasure. Forum has obviously stood the test of time, having won 6 Tonys, 2 Broadway revivals, and a film with comedy legends Zero Mostel and Phil Silvers. Definitely for mature audiences, this Metropolis production is a musical theater treasure.

- Regina Belt-Daniels continues to do what she loves best: teach, travel, and write theater reviews. She appears as Senator Karen Spelosi in the soon to be released Mike Preston film "Citizen Dick" and is currently directing RCLPC's summer production of "Morning's at

Seven”. A retired District 47 educator, she has appeared in or directed more than 50 shows in the Northern Illinois area.

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