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Lyric Theater captures spirit of bawdy Rome

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Lyric Theatre's "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum" is a zesty, gleeful trip that features Broadway import Jamie Torcellini as Pseudolus, the narrator/conversationalist who introduces "A Comedy Tonight."

Torcellini, who receives star billing above the title, deserves much credit for carrying the show, for he is a perfect farceur who is always "on."

He is totally at home with the audience, ad-libbing with delightful, amoral immediacy.

When a piece of scenery accidentally fell, he quickly covered with "And we're not even in California!"

Yes, Torcellini is the perfect actor in the perfect role. Of course, how could he lose with a script by Bart Shevelove and Larry Gelbart and music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim? This role, too, won a Tony for Zero Mostel when he introduced the character on Broadway in the '60s.

Torcellini makes the most of Doug Getzoff's colorful and whimsical stage set: He's everywhere at once on this Roman street 200 years before the Christian era.

It's a spring day when Pseudolus introduces everyone to henpecked Senex (Edmond's Terry Attebery), his bossy wife Domina (Cyndi Steele Harrod) and their lovesick son Hero (Sam McCoy) around whom the entire plot revolves.

Hero has fallen for lovely Philia (Amanda Martin), the beauty of beauties at Lycus's (David Dobson's) house of ill repute. Moreover, Lycus has already sold the virginal Philia to Miles Gloriosus (Mat Govich), a conceited Roman soldier, soon returning from battle.

To add insult even further, Senex mistakes Philia's overtures to Hero as sexual signals to himself, and Hero, fresh-faced, innocent and penniless, must now compete with his own father for romance, while wife/mother Domina is away visiting her own mother.

The casting could not be choicer. Slim, boyish Sam McCoy contrasts strongly with his seedy-looking, overweight father, portrayed with finesse by Attebery in his best role in years.

Only when Domina returns to claim her errant, neglectful husband can Pseudolus accomplish more as the matchmaker.

The duet "I'm Impossible" between Hero and Senex, each weighing his attributes in the quest for Philia, is a highlight of the show.

Cyndi Steele Harrod, graduate student in creative studies at the University of Central Oklahoma, uses her strong soprano voice to great advantage in her comic role as Domina.

Her delivery on "That Dirty Old Man" is a comic treat.

UCO's Mat Govich, on leave from Discoveryland where this summer he again is performing as Curly in "Oklahoma" as well as lead in "Seven Brides For Seven Brothers," fills a part ideally suited for him as the blustery Miles Gloriosus shining with impassioned energy and showing off the lower register of his tenor/baritone voice on "Bring Me My Bride" and "Funeral."

Throughout the show, Jonathan Beck Reed (Hysterium) brings classic merriment as the slave always at wit's end, never free from impending disasters.

His comic turn in this musical owes much to Harpo Marx.

Every piece of mimed business is polished to hilarity, and he knows how to sell a tune.

In the standout song "Everybody Ought To Have A Maid," he joins Pseudolus, Senex and Lycus in a rhythmic quartet of pure hi-jinks.

Besides lovely Philia and lively Domina, a bevy of beauties fills the stage.

Whirling, gyrating Tintinabula with copper-colored hair and jingling coins on her costume is served up by UCO's Cara Kem, and recent UCO graduate Beth Adele is exotic Panacea, also one of Lycus' girls.

The Geminae are gorgeous blonde identical twins portrayed by Amy Fristche and Anna Rayburn.

Brooke Alison Edward is mysterious Vibrata, and Amy Reynolds-Reed is exuberant Gymnasia. After all, Lycus, portrayed as a greedy man with an eye for many types of women by local lawyer/actor Dobson, relishes the part and is enjoyable to watch.

Adding Keystone Kops body language to the hilarity as slaves, are Chris Castleberry, Scott Harrison and Jonathan McElroy, the last remembered for several outstanding roles at Oklahoma Christian University. This trio keeps the comedy flowing with antic after antic.

And Enoch Elms, director of Oklahoma City University's Surrey Singers, adds another level of fun as a recurring shortsighted old man looking for his children (later miraculously found) and walking the hills of Rome.

Listen for the outstanding Sondheim ballad "Love I Hear," beautifully delivered early on by Sam McCoy. This memorable song is finally getting its due on several recorded tributes to the Sondheim genius.

Also, carefully observe Jeffrey Meek's beautiful and newly sewn costumes. **Dennis Courtney is responsible for the lightning-swift direction and vibrant choreography**, and Mariann Searle's musicians have never sounded better.