

Characters move fast in lively paced 'Forum'

Performances of the St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook production of the musical comedy "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" continue at 9 p.m. Friday-Sunday in the Greek Theatre at the Cranbrook Pavilion in Bloomfield Hills. For ticket information, call 644-0527 anytime.

By Barbara Michale special writer

Proving the old adage that the more things change the more they stay the same, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is a musical sexual farce set in ancient Rome.

The current production of St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook bursts with energy. In the show, as directed by Thomas Peterson III, characters don't run across the stage of the outdoor Greek Theater. They practically fly across during the extensive chase scenes. The one character who stays across the stage, aged Erronius (Stan

Evans), gets laughs out of sheer contrast.

The talented cast is led by Mark Watzl as the coming-of-age Pseudolus. Longing for his freedom, Pseudolus hopes to win the gratitude of his master's son. Young Hero (Martin Flynn) yearns for a girl who would never meet his father's approval. In his attempts to unite the young lovers, Pseudolus concocts an elaborate scheme involving mistaken identities, narrow escapes and manic confusion.

Watzl's Pseudolus is an engaging rascal with a mischievous grin. He is amusingly mincing one minute, heartily belting out a song the next.

TOTALLY UNLIKE Pseudolus, the senior household slave is the very staid and conventional Hyatterium, played by Francis Loud. Like a Roman "odd couple," Watzl and Loud are good foils.

Somehow Pseudolus inveigles Hyatterium into posing as a dead courtier. "Lovely" originally a duet for the young lovers, has a terribly funny

reprise when Pseudolus sings it to Hyatterium.

R. Joseph Dabbs is wonderful as Senex, the hen-pecked husband and would-be philanderer. His expressive face is a delight. Dabbs, Watzl and Loud team for "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid," each with his own ideas of how to employ her services.

Flynn seems just right as the awkward adolescent in the throes of first love. Leah Myers is appealing as Phila, the object of Hero's affections, and she has a lovely voice.

In a small role, Sue O'Brien is a real stand-out as Domina, the overbearing Roman matron. Morris Wenner is fine as Lycus, the slick businessman whose house is not a home, and Norris Anderson is appropriately smug as Captain Miles Gloriosus.

MOST ENERGETIC of all are the Proteans, Tim Teegarden, Jim Andres and Gene Murray, who manage to be everywhere at once, perpetually changing costumes and persona.

The outdoor theater's touchy sound

system worked fairly well on opening night despite 55 mph winds that sounded like thunder when they hit the amplifiers. The sets miraculously stayed upright. However, after many years of

watching the St. Dunstan musicals in cold and/or wet weather, my belief is that the theater group ought to seriously consider starting its run at least two weeks closer to summer.

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