THEATER

Musical 'Forum' a mirthful toga party

"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," 8 p.m. Friday, June 16; 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, June 17, Fordson High School Auditorium, 13800 Ford Road, (between Schaefer and Greenfield) Dearborn. Tickets $8 adults, $7 senior citizens. Call (313) 943-2354.

BOB WEIBEL

From the opening musical number "Comedy Tonight" to the surprise ending, Dearborn Community Theatre's, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is a mirthful toga party of slight gags, bawdy innuendos, double takes and mistaken identities.

"Forum" is your basic farce set to music, sprinkled with vaudeville and burlesque. This presents a challenge to performers because there is no where to learn broad physical comedy. Even the TV variety show has disappeared.

While some of the funny business is a bit forced at times, director Rosemary Gass, who teaches speech, forensics and English literature at Brother Rice High School in Bloomfield Hills, has rehearsed her troupe well. Dearborn's "Forum" has generally high production values with good scenery, costumes, music and staging.

REVIEW

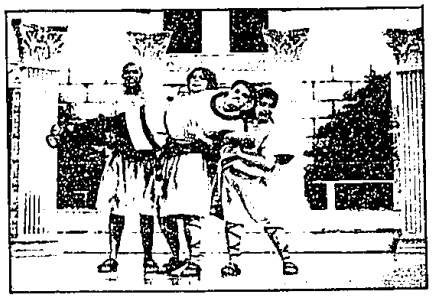
The setting is a lovely Roman courtyard with doors to three homes — one of which is a brothel. On the other side of the stage is the home of an old man who has gone off in search of his son and daughter. Center stage is the home of Senex (a dirty old man) and his son, Hero. What else would you expect in a farce?

Hero has his eye on a newly arrived courtesan — who it turns out is a virgin. To his slave, Pseudolus, he says, "Get me that girl, and you are free." The problem is, the girl has already been purchased by a self-centered captain in the Roman Army. And guess what? Hero's father, Senex, is also pursuing the damsel, thinking she is the new maid.

Around and around they go, with Tom Downey leading the way as the slave Pseudolus scheming for his freedom. With effervescence and energy he keeps the show moving as his plan survives one calamity after another.

Ron Richards, a science teacher and swim team coach at Brother Rice High School, is delightful as the naive, nerdy Hero. Rebecca Staffend of Livonia is springtime fresh as the slightly daffy virgin, Philia.

C.J. Nodus is splendid as the henpecked father, Senex, with an eye for a well-turned ankle. Dianne Bernick scores as his imperious wife, Domina.



Just for laughs: *Pseudolus (Thomas Downey of Westland) with the Proteans (left to right), Carlos Souffrant and Christoper Drouin of Troy and Michael Mousallam.*

Perhaps the best performance is turned in by Greg Viscomi as the smug and conceited Roman Captain, Miles Gloriousus. His asides, voice and character are excellent.

Clif Levin is likewise very good as the hyperactive slave, Hysterium and Matt Higgins has just the right touch of debauchery as Lycus, the buyer and seller of courtesans.

The courtesans add spice to the show, and Lewis Sequin grabs his share of laughs with a few lines as Erronius, the old man in search of his children. And guess what? He finds them in a gaggle of geese. How else would a farce end?

Music director is Carole Mihalo of Livonia. The cast also includes Thomas Downey of Westland as Prologus/Pseudolus, Chris Drouin and Carlos Souffrant of Troy as Proteans.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer, who has spent more than 25 years in community theater as a director, designer and performer.

'Comin' of Age' showcases local talent

"Comin' of Age," Attic Theater, Third at West Grand Boulevard, New Center Area, Detroit. Previews June 15-18. Shows 8 p.m. Thursday-Sunday, June 22 to July 16, matinee 2 p.m. Sundays. Tickets $19-24. Call (313) 875-8284 or Ticketmaster (810) 645-6666.

BY EDITH BROIDA
SPECIAL WRITER

When the curtain rises tonight on the preview performance of the musical, "Comin' of Age," at Detroit's Attic Theater, it will mark the professional debut of Bloomfield Hills writer and composer Carol Caplan.

A former interior designer, Caplan has devoted the past seven years to fine-tuning of its upbeat score and script.

"Comin' of Age," which premieres at the Attic Thursday, June 22, chronicles a young man's search for identity in a family that cheerfully and courageously copes with aging in a youth-oriented society. From the way they gracefully grow old, he learns to grow up.

As a new playwright and composer, Caplan believes that it's been her good fortune to secure top talent for her first professional production.

Larry Kaushansky of West Bloomfield, head of Wayne State University's scenic design department, agreed to read Caplan's script, assess the Attic Theater's modestly equipped stage, and then design the ingenious set.

Artist Richard Kozlow of Birmingham, who, after sketching for just minutes, created the perfect logo of a young man cutting the strings, capturing the musical's theme.

She is equally enthusiastic about musical director Bernie Katz of Detroit, who fine-tuned the music and director Dan Yurgultis, professor of theater at the University of Arizona who returned to stage the production.

Caplan confesses she is awed how their work with a versatile cast of local performers, including Laurie Meeker of Redford, has brought 12 different characters to life.

Caplan's formula for success?

"Work day and night for seven or more years, have a perpetual hunger to learn, and, most of all, find outstanding talent," she said.

Ten years ago Caplan resumed piano lessons after a 25-year hiatus. She had studied piano rather indifferently as a teenager, but then college, marriage, two daughters and a design career interrupted the music.

When the piano beckoned again, Caplan thought cutting her nails would be the only necessary sacrifice. But, instead, she found herself totally engrossed in music. Soon she was commuting to classes at three universities. "I couldn't get enough," she recalled.

Before long, Caplan was spending eight hours a day with her new "baby" — the grand piano that was a 50th birthday gift from her husband, David.

Once Caplan felt saturated with everything the university music departments had to offer, she began to compose. She learned how to use elaborate recording and computer equipment to provide orchestration, then added lyrics.

Caplan's first success came from a series of light-hearted laments about growing older. She incorporated them into a revue, "The Other Side of 45," which was presented in workshop productions by the Westport Theater Players in Connecticut in 1992 and by the Jewish Ensemble Theater in West Bloomfield in 1993.

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