

Mild-Mannered Professionals by Day — Bawdy Singing Romans by Night! Meet the Cast of Barker's A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum



Ever see the one about the Roman slave who tries to win his freedom by helping his master shag the girl next door? Oh yes, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, that bawdy door-slamming, toga-wearing, swinging '60s romp of a musical is back onstage in all its glory at Barker Playhouse for two weekends of performances, running May 10-19.

The show that spawned a thousand cabaret versions of "Comedy Tonight!" and "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid" has been around since its Broadway debut in 1962. While the plot is pure ribald farce, the Tony Award-winning show has an incredible pedigree, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and a book by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart (of *M*A*S*H* fame). Inspired by ancient Roman farces, the musical sets audiences up for every imaginable double entendre, complete with door slamming, cross-dressing cases of mistaken identities and sure-fire musical numbers sure to tickle even the staunchest funny bone.

I spoke to some of the show's cast about what it was like to jump from their daily career and family routines into the sandals of these scheming slaves, ladies of the evening, soldiers, pimps and eunuchs — along the way discovering more than a few surprises.

With more than 40 years of stage credits with Barker, chances are good that you have seen actress **Elizabeth R. Messier** onstage in one show or another. "I consider The Players my home away from home," says Messier. "I joined way back when, answering an ad looking for ingenues! Where once I played the ingenue — now it is the character role that fits the bill!" In *Forum*, Messier plays the battle-ax comic role of Domina. When not "playing at The Players," as she calls it, her workday role of VP of Relocation Services may take her just a block away from the theater to her office at Residential

Properties, but it is truly a world away from the larger than life character that she plays in the show. Heading into her 22nd year with Residential Properties, Messier and her staff work with corporations and individuals moving into or out of the state to help them with every aspect of their upcoming move. "I work with amazing people," she adds. "Most everyone knows I am involved at The Players and often come to see the shows I am performing in."

Director **Michael Farrelly** also finds his work colleagues to be very supportive of the shows that he directs and acts in. An educator in the South County school system for nearly 30 years, he typically directs a show every other year in order to make time for his own performance opportunities and to keep his work/life schedule balanced. He spends his days teaching and then with about an hour's break makes his way to the theater for rehearsal. Farrelly is no stranger to *Forum*, having directed the show for Academy Players when the group was at the Odeum Theater 13 years ago. "Three members of the cast are reviving their roles from the last time I directed the show," he tells me. "Jackie Granja, who is playing Tintinabula; Bobby DeMattio, who is a protean; and Trish St. Laurent, one of The Geminae. Over the years, Farrelly has worked with many of *Forum's* huge cast at other venues. "They are all a joy to work with," Farrelly says. "This has been an exciting adventure, as this is truly a very experienced group of actors coming together to perform."

Jackie Granja is happy to be working with Farrelly again, as well as making her Barker debut. Granja is playing courtesan Tintinabula, a role that requires she "speak fluent cymbal" and be adept at belly-dancing. "She is a fun role to play, and I am finding out new things about her the second time around," she explains. Granja can be found working at "The Studio" in Narragansett, where she currently teaches ballet. "Acting is an integral part of the ballet," she explains, "so none of my students are surprised that I do a bit of theater from time to time, and they are very supportive."

Kevin J. Hernandez, who plays Marcus Lycus in *Forum*, spends his days in Brocton, Mass, as a Service Coordinator for the Department of Developmental Services. "Being a family man and public servant is almost a flip side to my character, the self-described "Merchant of Love." He explains that this term is used in the play as a very thin euphemism for what he really is — a pimp. "Getting the chance to throw off my daily role of being responsible and largely respectable and just be a creep is so much fun," he says. Hernandez tells an amusing anecdote of the time when a new member to his family's Temple brought it up to him that she once saw him perform in Lenny Schwartz's *The Inside of his Severed Head*, a play in which his character was "far less clothed" than he appeared before her at school that night. "It still gives us a good chuckle," he adds.

Trish St. Laurent plays one of The Geminae, one of Marcus Lycus's courtesans. "That's a nice way of saying prostitute," jokes St. Laurent. She describes her "regular life" outside of the theater as multifaceted. "Primarily I'm a mom of three," she explains. "Only one is home now, and she is 15. My oldest (age 25) is getting his Ph.D. in biology, and my younger son (age 21) is a senior in college. Times were much busier when all three were home, obviously. However, my daughter is very active, and I am always chauffeuring her around to a variety of places." She sings in the church choir as well as working part-time at the Narragansett Library. "Since I live in Narragansett that also means that I have a bit of a commute to Providence four times a week," she says, adding, "I truly love it though, so it doesn't bother me."

Playing the other Gemini Twin is actress **Carole Reavey**. "This is my debut at Barker," she explains, "as I have recently returned to theater after having played my most important role in life as a mother to my son Salvatore, now 24." By day, Reavey is a licensed esthetician, something she has been doing

professionally for 18 years. "I 'perform' my wonderful, effective facials at an amazing establishment in Warwick called R.G.E. I work among 15 other beauty professionals from hair stylists to massage therapists and everything in between." Since returning to performing this year, she has had plenty of stories to share with her clients and co-workers. "It's been exciting and fun for all of us to be a part of the creative process as many of them come and see my shows and plays," she explains. "Their support and love and interest is priceless..."

Jim Lyons plays the comic role of a eunuch in the show. "About eight years ago, community theater came into my life, and it has been love ever since." He has worked as a business analyst for the past 22 years for IGT (formerly GTECH). "My job is technical, the people I work with are engineers," he explains. "On any given day I am working to ensure that a customer's business needs are documented and understood well enough as to be developed by a software engineer — performing on stage is very much out of that box." But that is not to say that his workmates are not supportive. Lyons tells of a time when one of his superiors heard about his performing. "He said, 'I don't get invited to your next show you are off the island.'" Lyons replied that this was no problem, but "you'll have to buy a block of tickets," which they did. "That night of the show...I had a group of more than 15 colleagues cheering me on," he adds. "It was wonderful."

Rebecca Kilcline plays Philia, Hero's love interest in *Forum* as well as designing the show's costumes. The mother of two teenage boys, she is a part-time music teacher and co-directs their church's music program with her husband, Wayne. Many of Kilcline's fellow cast members find a balance between their family roles and their stage roles, and **Jill Pinto Gould** is no exception. Gould, also a mother of two, plays courtesan Panacea and has been a middle school teacher for more than 20 years in Rhode Island as well as volunteer and co-chair of the Lincoln Athletic Council. "All of my friends in and out of work know about my 'other life' and are very supportive," she says, adding, with a laugh, "I hope my students don't get wind of the show...it would be a bit awkward if they saw me playing a hooker!"

Playing the lead role of Pseudolus, the Roman slave desperate to gain his freedom, is **Anthony F. DeRose**. "As an actor, I like to think Pseudolus is one of the greatest comedic roles to play in musical theater," says DeRose, "and it's a joy each and every time I step onstage to follow in the footsteps of comedic greats like Zero Mostel, Phil Silvers and Nathan Lane." By day, DeRose is the operation coordinator for a primary care practice in Providence. But DeRose also has an alter-ego in his well-known drag persona, Jacqueline DiMera. As Jacqueline, DeRose has won the titles of Miss Gay RI, Empress of the Imperial Court of RI, Miss Gay RI USofA Newcomer, Miss Gay Kentucky USofA Newcomer and is affectionately known as "Rhode Island's Drag Sweetheart." When asked if his personas have ever collided, DeRose says, "There definitely have been some interesting moments." He tells of one Drag Brunch on a Sunday morning that required him to dash right off to rehearsal afterward. "All of the sudden, you have Pseudolus on stage in a scene in a lovely purple designer cocktail dress, jewelry and some very stylized hair."

The Players present A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, book by Larry Gelbart and Burt Shevelove, music by Stephen Sondheim, directed by Michael Farrelly from May 10-19 at the Barker Playhouse, 400 Benefit Street, Providence with evening shows Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30pm and 2pm matinees on Sundays. For reservations call 401-273-0590 or email players1909@gmail.com.