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The Comedy of Errors

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Otterbein College Theatre

The Comedy of Errors



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

MARCH 12-13-14-15, 1980

Director – ROBERT ELLENSTEIN
Designer and Technical Director – FRED J. THAYER
Costume Designer – KATHLEEN LEWICKI
Producer – CHARLES W. DODRILL

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Fred Allen, the great comedian of the heyday of radio, called comedy, "a treadmill to oblivion." Most of us will agree there is nothing flatter than last week's joke – cold potatoes. A look at a New Yorker cartoon of twenty-five years ago or hearing a Bob Hope one-liner of yesteryear will often evoke no greater reaction than a rather clinical analysis: something like, "Oh, yes. I remember; that was funny because"

Yes, much humor is tied to current events, personalities and attitudes, and this certainly applies to the comedies of Shakespeare. How can a modern audience have a comic appreciation of the stiff, non-smiling, Puritan attitudes of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* when they do not have the daily contact with such people the Elizabethans had? To my mind, the fun of modern productions of classic comedies must emerge from the universal humor of word play, character and situation; for the local and temporal gags no longer work.

The question in the mind of every director or producer of a comedy revival is the fear-laden one of "Is it still funny?" This doubt often leads we theatre workers into paths of strange behavior. "Well," we say, "I'm not sure if it still plays; but, don't worry, we'll make it hilarious!"

Uncertain of the value of the play we start to fix it even before it goes into production. We change the locale, we update it, we modernize it, throw in funny props, four-seated bicycles and belching vintage Pierce-Arrows, set it in a circus and electrify the costumes. If a fireworks display is possible, we'll do that. Anything, as long as we can find enough funny stuff to make this creaky old play palatable. In other words, we tend to think Mr. Shakespeare didn't know his business; or, even if he did with his tragedies, his comic work is now passé.

What to do? What to do? I am to direct *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare's very first attempt to write comedy. I had seen a couple of productions of the play, both full of schticks and energetic cavorting movement; mildly amusing when the actors are brilliant, pretty dull stuff when they are not. I have the impression from the performances that there isn't much of a play there, and they have saved the evening by inventive production values. The performers have come off better than Shakespeare, and maybe I should have stayed home and watched the Fonz.

I do remember seeing the musical version, "The Boys from Syracuse," when I was younger and that was fun; but all of this does not answer my questions! "Where's the handle? What's it all about? What's the skeleton? How do I approach this play?"

I ask around to others who have done the play. The answers are all in result terms: "These are the gags we used," "We did it with this kind of set and costumes." I tell John Houseman that I want to find an approach that will be true to Shakespeare and does he have any suggestions. He replies that, "It is, of course, doubtful that Shakespeare wrote the play in the first place."

Since no "man with the book of answers" is stepping forward to solve my quandary, I am at last, my back to the wall, forced to that final extremity – I must look to the play. "There must be something there," I say to myself. "After all, Shakespeare took the plot from Plautus and it has lasted two thousand years. Take courage and plunge in!"

So I did. I discovered husband-wife relationships, hostile city-states, business dealings, church and state and individual conflicts, master-slave interaction that I never saw before, weaving themselves into the background fabric of the play. Above all, I reaffirmed that the universal comedic themes of human vanity and short-sightedness, verbal by-play, mistaken identity, and coincidental chance still apply today and can make us laugh as much as they did the Romans and Elizabethans.

At last, we have tried to let the play tell us how we should do it. You must be the judge of how well we have listened.

Robert Ellenstein

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GUEST ARTIST

Robert Ellenstein has been a professional director and teacher of acting since the late forties when he was on the acting staff of the Cleveland Play House. Since then, besides pursuing a career in the theatre, film, and television, he has been guest director and instructor at California State-Northridge, California State-Los Angeles, and Case-Western Reserve. A graduate of the University of Iowa, Mr. Ellenstein took his early training at the Dramatic Workshop and the American Theatre Wing in New York. He has directed for the Theatre Guild, The New Dramatists Committee, live and filmed television, and several theatres in Ohio and the west coast. He was contract coach for Screen Gems and directed eight operas at the Los Angeles Music Center. He is artistic director of the Los Angeles Repertory Company and the past four winters has appeared in nine plays and directed *Hamlet* at Tucson's Arizona Theatre Company. As an actor, Mr. Ellenstein first came to national attention in the fifties on live television where he played a wide variety of roles, from Einstein to Quasimodo. Moving to Hollywood twenty-two years ago, he has appeared in fourteen feature films including: *North by Northwest*, *The Young Lions*, *Illegal*, *3:10 to Yuma*, *Love at First Bite*; and hundreds of filmed television shows. He has appeared in several stage musicals (*Oliver!* last summer); most notable is directing and co-starring with Juliet Prowse in *Irma la Douce*. Mr. Ellenstein co-starred in the National Company and six theatre-in-the-round productions of that show. His wife runs a book service in Los Angeles where he lives with her and their three children, two of whom are actors. Mr. Ellenstein will stage *The Comedy of Errors* for the 1980 season of the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival.

PRODUCER'S CORNER

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS marks the 19th consecutive year that professional guest actors and/or directors have worked with Otterbein students in the annual "guest artist production." Past guests such as Hans Conreid, Ed Begley, Arnold Moss, Kim Hunter, Viveca Lindfors, Pat Hingle, Brock Peters, George Grizzard, Robert Forster, Robert Morse and Tony Roberts have contributed enormously to the growth and development of our students and the total theatre program. Impact is perhaps best measured by the recent study revealing that nearly 80 Otterbein graduates since 1970 are currently making their living by working in professional, educational and community theatres.

Our work this year with guest professional director and teacher ROBERT ELLENSTEIN reaffirms our belief in the validity of the "guest artist" program as an educational and professional experience for all concerned. His presence confirms the potential of a working relationship with the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival that begins with this production . . . and it confirms the validity of the practicing artist functioning in the classroom! What a joy the past five weeks have been for all of us! A dynamo of energy sharing 30 years of professional experience with Otterbein theatre students in rehearsals and in the classroom. His activities include daily work from 10 a.m. to noon with junior acting studio students, almost daily sessions with *COMEDY* cast members in the afternoon, design and production conferences with faculty and students, plus evening and weekend rehearsals. Throughout this period Bob has constantly challenged everyone involved, encouraging creativity, stimulating originality and adventurous activities while at the same time positively reinforcing efforts that need further work and study. We admire and appreciate his considerable professional expertise and we welcome his presence among us, for his impact on theatre at Otterbein will continue long after he leaves. We hope to have the opportunity of sharing work with him again.

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CAST

Solinus (Duke of Ephesus)	D. SCOTT DILLON**
Egeon (a merchant of Syracuse)	JOHN TENER*
Antipholus of Ephesus	JOHN W. EBNER**
Antipholus of Syracuse	RICHARD T. TATGENHORST*
Dromio of Ephesus	GREGG KIMBRO*
Dromio of Syracuse	MICHAEL A. ECHOLS**
Balthazar (a merchant)	EVAN ECHTMAN*
Angelo (a goldsmith)	RICHARD BUCKLEY*
First Merchant (friend to Antipholus of Syracuse)	T. DAVID MARCIA*
Second Merchant (to whom Angelo is debtor)	JAMES HARLOW*
Pinch (a schoolmaster)	LAWRENCE J. SHERWOOD
Emilia (an Abbess of Ephesus)	DONNA WILLIAMSON
Adriana (wife to Antipholus of Ephesus)	JOY C. BUNDY**
Luciana (her sister)	KAREN R. RADCLIFFE**
Luce (servant to Adriana)	LINDA BRACILANO*
The Courtesan	JEANINE HOWE**
Officer	TOD WILSON
Jailer	HAROLD MARVIN*
Other Courtesans	LINDA FINNELL**, CHERYL J. NEWCOMB*, TONYE PATANO
Nuns	MARIBETH GRAHAM*, LAURA RUDY*
Vegetable Monger	LISA WUNDERLICH
Lady	GWEN M. TORRY*
Guards	WES SHILLINGTON, CARL WOLFE
Baker	MIKE SHOAF
Fisherman	KEN KLINGERMAN
Sailor	A. VICTOR JONES

PLACE – A town square in ancient Ephesus.

There will be one intermission.

Use of cameras or tape recorders is strictly prohibited.

Otterbein College Theatre is affiliated with the American College Theatre Festival, The Ohio Theatre Alliance, the American Theatre Association, and the United States Institute of Theatre Technology.

* Indicates membership in Cap and Dagger Drama Club

** Indicates membership in Theta Alpha Phi National Theatre Honorary

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Director of Theatre	DR. CHARLES W. DODRILL
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Instructor-Director	PROF. DONALD L. PAISLEY
Instructor-Designer	PROF. KATHLEEN LEWICKI
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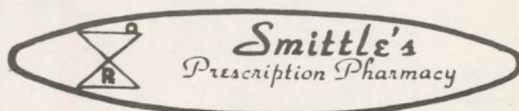
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Musical Selection: FONTAINE FOLLANSBEE*

Props: SANDRA MARTIN*, GINA ZELAZNY*, Co-Chm.; JULIE ARMENTROUT, CAROL GIFFEN, A. VICTOR JONES

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