

COLUMBUS DISPATCH
COLUMBUS, O.
P.M. - CRL. 198,100
SUN. - CRL. 829,500

JUL - 3-80

Vaughan Sparkles In 'Forum'

Non-Stop Laughter At Otterbein

389 Constant comedy is expected of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and Otterbein Summer Theater succeeds in its production of the farcical musical.

Featuring Ed Vaughan, the show continues at 8:30 p.m. Thursday and Saturday and next Wednesday through July 12 in Campus Center Arena Theater.

FORUM GOES FOR THE big laughs. It's about as subtle as a thunderstorm.

Where else can you find a slave seeking his freedom, a father and son competing for the love of a virgin who has been sold to a pompous military man, an old fellow searching for his abducted children and a house full of courtesans?

Something is happening all the time in *Forum*. Somehow, as improbable as it looks, the pieces fit together in a way that one can only believe after being led through a series of implausibilities by an adorable rascal.

That rascal is Pseudolus who strings players and patrons along until he gets his freedom. Using the conventions of the theater, Pseudolus talks to the au-



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dience and rescues himself by uttering one of the few words that will send everybody streaming out of the auditorium. And it isn't "Fire."

VAUGHAN IS RECREATING Pseudolus, a role he had in 1973 in an Otterbein production of the show. He steals the show by using some of the wildest bits in a burlesque style of comedy.

He alone could be credited with making this production one of the most amusing that will hit a Columbus stage for several months.

But the delightful performances by the regular members of this summer's company have to receive a big share of the credit, too.

Particularly enjoyable is Dick

Buckley's Hysterium whose impersonation of a dead virgin is side-splitting. Bedecked in a blonde wig that looks like it escaped from Dolly Parton's boudoir, Buckley makes the *Lovely* reprise in Act 2 the musical highlight of the show.

FONTAINE FOLLANSBEE is the empty-headed virgin courtesan who seems to be attracting every male's eye. She wittily lampoons the brainless beauty with a speech impediment.

Rich Tatgenhorst brings innocent confusion to Hero, the only logical prospect for the young lady's hand.

John Ebner and Linda Finnell play his parents. Their appearances lend much to the play's silliness. Ebner has a good duet with Tatgenhorst in Act 1's *Impossible*. With Buckley as a prop, Miss Finnell is able to make up for any vocal inabilities and win chuckles in *That Dirty Old Man*.

As Marcus Lycus, operator of the neighborhood bawdy house, Michael Echols demonstrates great adaptation to comic situations and leaves lechery out of Lycus' motives.

EGOTISTICAL MILES Gloriosus receives the right touches from Jeffrey Gerber. What a fool is this man who thinks the sun rises and sets as he wishes.

Carlyle B. Owens III wanders the seven hills of Rome as senile Erronius. His presence pokes fun at the long lost heir myth.

Forum has some problems translating from proscenium to the round. When characters enter the houses in the Otterbein production, they must go off stage, thus eliminating some of the

sideshows that could go on around the main action.

Erronius' trapeze about the hills likewise loses something in the round.

DIRECTOR DOREEN Dunn, who also did the choreography, makes thorough use of the arena with her cast in close contact with the audience on all four sides.

For the most part, she exercised sound judgment in knowing when to curb the comic flavorings, with two exceptions. She can be faulted for playing the twin courtesans as Siamese twins at one point and then having them later appear separately, in costumes that did not match.

The other exception comes when

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Miles Dunn has two of Miles Gloriosus' soldiers carry him around, a device that can be interrupted several ways. But that contrivance dilutes the climactic end of Act 1 when Gloriosus threatens Pseudolus' life.

THE FINE SET BY David Hammond really looks like marble. Musical director Lyle Barkhymer, distinguished from the rest of the orchestral ensemble by a crown of laurel leaves, created fine accompaniment to the stage antics.

Otterbein's production of *Forum* truly is a *Comedy Tonight* that can lighten even the darkest hearts.



Nancy Gilson

Vaughan master of Otterbein 'Forum' fun

You know how it is when you watch an expert musical comedian perform? He's so charismatic, so appealing, that when it's all over, you'd like to take him home with you.

That's the way you'll feel about Ed Vaughan in Otterbein Summer Theatre's current "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way to the Forum."

Vaughan, an Otterbein graduate, is recreating the role of Pseudolus, the freedom-happyslave, which he performed at OST in 1973. The production, directed and choreographed by New Yorker Doreen Dunn, is pretty good, but Vaughan is its strength and star.

"Forum" (by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart with songs by Stephen Sondheim) is almost more of a burlesque show than a musical. It's broad farce set in

an ancient Rome populated with henpecked husbands, domineering wives, groveling slaves, innocent youths and bump and grind courtesans.

Most everyone except Pseudolus is looking for a tumble in the hay and he wouldn't mind one if it went along with his liberation.

Except for the raucous opening and closing theme, "Comedy Tonight," the music in "Forum" is not especially memorable. Never mind, the fun comes from a helter-skelter pace, absurd mistaken identities and bawdy slapstick.

Vaughan is the master of it all.

His countenance is impish. Sometimes he folds his arms Jack Benny style and halts the action with a deadpan gaze of his brown eyes. Then, with a little skip of his jogging shoes, he sets his toga and the comedy in motion.

It's also pleasant to watch Vaughan work with the OST actors. He keeps the young lovers (Rich Tatgenhorst as Hero and Fontaine Follansbee as Philia) from becoming saccharine. His drooling at the smorgasbord of courtesans makes "The House of Marcus Lycus" boisterous.

There are other nice performances, specifically John Ebner as the stogie-chomping Senex and Dick Buckley as the harassed slave Hysterium.

One of the best numbers is "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid," sung by Vaughan, Ebner, Buckley and Mihael Echols.

The production's weaknesses are well camouflaged.

Most of the singers aren't up to solo work, but the small, capable orchestra maintains a peppy pace and covers for off-key pitches.

The costumes look shabby and the set — which is supposed to be three pompous Roman houses in which the shenanigans occur — is only several columns and a marbelized floor.

Given the limits of the tiny, in-the-round theater, however, Director Dunn capably corrals the action. Probably her cleverest work comes in Act II's rowdy chase scene. The characters suffer collisions and narrow misses in hilarious, fast motion.

A lot of the verbal side shows are omitted, however, because there's no place for them. It would have been fun to see what Dunn and Vaughan could have done with more space.

As it is, Otterbein's "Forum" is a miniature delight. Vaughan's manipulative, naughty Pseudolus could have been a one-man show, but instead he uses his talents to pull the show together. He's an unselfish, waggish actor.

Saucy 'Forum' will please OST patrons

By Sarah Skaates

Light-hearted spoofery is the nature of this week's Otterbein Summer Theatre offering.

"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is a happy take-off on the theme of classical comedy, and the OST company led by professional actor Ed Vaughn brought it to life with bouncy enthusiasm.

The play is peopled with such stock characters as the sharp-tongued wife and her dominated husband, the young lovers, the aging parent seeking his long-lost children, the clever slave and his loyal counterpart.

The plot, too, is a mixture of stock elements employed to bring about the union of the lovers, reunion of parent and children, and freedom to the slave.

But "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is a spoof, and as such lets the audience share in the fun of parodying the comedic style with its deliberate exaggeration.

Director / choreographer Doreen Dunn and the company maintain an effective balance of perspective which lets the show work as a parody without losing touch with the integrity of the original style.

Ed Vaughn as Pseudolus, the clever slave, dominated the show from beginning to end. With understatement and a tongue-in-cheek approach, Vaughn set the tone of the show and maintained it.

As the second slave, Hysterium, Dick Buckley polished his growing reputation of an actor whose sense of timing and character make him particularly well suited to comedy.

Fontaine Follansbee and Rich Tatgenhorst were required to do little but exude loveliness and tender

romance. In addition to handling that assignment convincingly, they brought the two best voices of the company to bear on the score.

Jeffrey Garbr fairly crackled with assurance and macho as the captain who comes to claim Follansbee as his bride.

Michael Echols and John Ebner rounded out the cast of major characters with Linda Finnell and Carlyle B. Owens III providing close support.

The gaggle of beauties-for-hire cavorted convincingly with the help of Kathleen Lewicki's showy costumes.

"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" features a bouncy score by Stephen Sondheim, with the theme "Comedy

Tonight", the exuberant "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid," and "Lovely" being the most memorable.

The company handled the singing chores with competence and charm making up for whatever vocal weaknesses they possessed.

The orchestra composed of Lyle Barkhymer, Margaret Million, Kris Lehman, Chris Ciampa and Peg Fagerberg gave sure support to the musical framework of the show.

"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" might well be paraphrased "A Funny Thing Happened Inside the Campus Center."

It's a solid piece of entertainment with a saucy brand of comedy which should please the taste of all OST patrons.

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