

WU?[@]therep

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM

Book by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Directed by Edward Stern

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A FUNNY THING
HAPPENED ON
THE WAY TO THE **FORUM**

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the 11

At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things

are worth slowing down for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together

WU? @ THE REP—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (**A/S/L**), a plot summary (**FYI**), background information on the playwright (**F2F**) and other NTK information. Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means **IRL**, anyway.

CU@therep!

The Teacher's Lounge



In an effort to make our educational materials more accessible to students and easier for educators to incorporate into the classroom, we have adopted a new, more student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, www.repstl.org for additional information regarding the production elements, such as scenery, costumes, and lighting. Any materials, either from this guide, or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom. As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

NEATO!

Show Me Standards: CA 1, 2, 5, 6, 7; FA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; SS 2, 3, 6 and Illinois Learning Standards: 1, 2, 4, 14, 16, 18, 25, 26, 27, 30.

MIHYAP: TOP TEN WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED AT THE REP

10. TBA Ushers will seat your school or class as a group, so even if you are dying to mingle with the group from the all girls school that just walked in the door, stick with your friends until you have been shown your section in the theatre.

9. SITD The house lights will dim immediately before the performance begins and then go dark. Fight off that oh-so-immature urge to whisper, giggle like a grade schooler, or yell at this time and during any other blackouts in the show.

8. SED Before the performance begins, turn off all cell phones, pagers, beepers and watch alarms. If you need to text, talk, or dial back during intermission, please make sure to click off before the show resumes.

7. TMI Not to sound like your mom, but "if you need to go now, you needed to go then." Leaving the theatre during the performance is disruptive, so take care of any personal needs before the show starts.

6. RTM When you arrive at the theatre, read the production program. It's like a deluxe version of liner notes and a free souvenir, all in one.

5. P-ZA? NW! Though your ability to eat ten slices at one sitting may impress your friends, no one wants to listen to you chew, slurp, or smack, so please leave all food, drink, and gum outside the theatre.

4. TLK-2-U-L-8-R We know that you will be dying to discuss what you see onstage with your friends, but please wait until intermission. Any talking—even whispering—is very distracting for both the actors onstage and the audience seated around you.

3. LOL Without you, we really wouldn't have a show. It's your job to laugh when a scene is funny or maybe even shed a tear or two in a tender moment. However, since you are not the audience at *The Jerry Springer Show* please refrain from inappropriate responses such as talking, whistling, making catcalls or singing along with the performers.

2. SOP While it's great that you want a celeb picture of your day at The Rep, the theatre is off-limits to the paparazzi. Flash photography interrupts the performance and along with videorecording is prohibited by Actors Equity rules. You can sneak a peek at production photos on our website, www.repstl.org.

1. LLTA Let the actors know that you respect their work by remaining for the curtain call at the end of the performance. Show your appreciation through applause.

A/S/L

SENEX, suffering from a mid-life crisis, is eager for a bit of excitement after years of avoiding conflict with his wife by avoiding contact with her.

DOMINA knows no greater pleasure than giving orders, whether it is to her husband, her son or her servants.

HERO, Senex and Domina's son, is more adult than either of them expects and much to his dismay, shares his father's taste in women.

HYSTERIUM is the hilariously uptight slave-in-chief of Senex's household.

PSEUDOLUS is an enterprising slave eager to escape his obligation to Senex's family.

ERRONIUS is Senex's visually challenged neighbor who is newly home from searching for his long lost children.

MILES GLORIOSUS is a self-important, hot-tempered general better suited for the catwalk than the battlefield.

MARCUS LYCUS is the entrepreneur on Senex's block, buying and selling courtesans out of his home.

PHILIA, a virgin from Crete, is a special order in Marcus Lycus's business and the object of more than one man's affections.

TINTINABULA, PANACEA, THE GEMINAE, VIBRATA and GYMNASIA complete Marcus Lycus' catalog of courtesans.

THE PROTEANS, true to their name, adopt numerous minor roles throughout.



READ MORE ABOUT IT

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books.

Gelbart, Larry. *Laughing Matters: On Writing M*A*S*H, Tootsie, Oh, God!, and a Few Other Funny Things*. Random House, 1998.

Gordon, Joanne. *Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim* (Quality Paperbacks Series) (Paperback). Da Capo Press, 1992.

Kislan, Richard. *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater*. (Paperback). Applause Books, 2000.

Plautus. Trans. Erich Segal. *Four Comedies: The Braggart Soldier, The Brothers Menaechmus, The Haunted House, The Pot of Gold*. Oxford UP, 1998.

Secret, Meryle. *Stephen Sondheim: A life*. Delta, 1999.

Segal, Erich. *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus*. Oxford UP, 1987.

Shevelove, Burt. *The Frogs: A Comedy Written in 405 B.C.* The Dramatic Pub. Co., 1975.



EV



DRAWING FROM the classic comedies of Plautus, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* takes a hilarious look at love and liberty in the fledgling republic of Rome, where everyone is seeking, some are hiding and a few are hiding what they seek. Master of the game is Pseudolus, a wannabe citizen who is biding his time as a slave until he can devise a plan to gain his freedom, and master of Pseudolus is Senex, who is raising his blissfully naïve son, Hero with his aptly named wife, Domina. Senex holds an interesting piece of real estate in that his home sits between a vacant house owned by the elderly Erronius who has been searching for his missing son and daughter for years, and a mansion that houses the merchandise, if you will, of courtesan trader Marcus Lycus. Unbeknownst to his parents, Hero has developed a very serious crush on a particular member of Lycus' household and enlists the help of Pseudolus in acquiring her. Pseudolus agrees, under the condition that if he is successful, Hero will grant him his freedom. Two typical barriers stand in the way of their success—money and power. The courtesan that Hero has chosen will be exorbitantly expensive to purchase, and both Hero and Pseudolus are under the obsessively watchful eye of slave-in-chief, Hysterium.

THE BARGAINER extraordinaire, Pseudolus quickly learns that matters are more complicated than he had expected because Hero's choice, Philia, is a special order item—a virgin fresh from Crete on reserve for captain Miles Gloriosus who is in transit to claim her. Nothing can stand in the way of love though, and Pseudolus sets out to make a match, telling Lycus that a deadly plague is sweeping across Crete and that his virgin is most likely infected. Claiming to have already had the illness himself, he

offers to quarantine her at his house, instead. Lycus, fearful of losing his other "stock" readily accepts, and Pseudolus thinks his work is nearly finished. He encounters yet another snag though when Philia, who admits to being in love with Hero, denies herself the pleasure of his company because she is rightfully the property of the captain who has already paid in full for her.

WHILE PSEUDOLUS is working to resolve this ethical quandary, Senex returns home to find Philia, who mistakes her host for her captain and offers herself to him. Senex, none too familiar with such good fortune, cannot pass on the opportunity but does have the moral rectitude to go next door to Erronius' vacant home so as not to lead his son astray. Pseudolus appears just in time to prevent the spoiling of Philia and his chances for freedom, but unfortunately, so does Erronius. As soon as Pseudolus diverts Erronius' attention from the courtesan stashed in his house, Miles Gloriosus' trumpets sound, announcing his imminent arrival to claim his bride. And for the *coup de gras*, Domina returns home, suspecting that her husband may be wandering.

TO SUM UP: Domina is looking for Senex; Senex is looking for Philia; Philia is looking for Hero (and her captain); Erronius is looking for his children; Pseudolus is looking for freedom; and very soon, everyone will be looking for Pseudolus. Only a genius could untangle the mass of mistaken identities, missed rendezvous and madness that ensues, but somehow, Pseudolus, the little slave that could, does—bonding lovers, reuniting families and spreading democracy—all in less than three hours. Hold on tight for the back to back jokes and high jinks of this hyper speed game of grown up hide and seek.



face 2 face

Where the hell is everybody when they first deliver the typing paper? Where are all the 'helpers' when those boxes full of silence come in? Blank. Both sides. No clue, no instructions enclosed on how to take just twenty-six letters and endlessly rearrange them so that you can turn them into a mirror of a part of our lives. Try it sometime. Try doing what I do before I do it.

Although these comments could probably belong to anyone who has ever tried to write anything, they are actually the words of Larry Gelbart, as spoken by the character Stine in *City of Angels*. Gelbart, along with Burt Shevelove and Stephen Sondheim, poured over those twenty-six letters in the form of the surviving works of the Roman writer, Plautus, for almost five years—writing, re-writing, adding, subtracting and generally rearranging—until they combined Shevelove and Gelbart's irreverent book with Sondheim's clever lyrics and score to produce what we now know as the riotously funny musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in 1962.

Sondheim, whose name is today synonymous with musical theatre, was at the time a relative newcomer to Broadway, with lyric credits for *Gypsy* and *West Side Story* behind him. Gelbart was steeped in writing for radio and television, penning for such notable comedians as Danny Thomas, Eddie Cantor, Jack Parr, Bob Hope and Red Buttons. Shevelove was also working in television as Buttons' director and it was through this connection that the writing team met. Gelbart, probably best known for his role as the creator of *M*A*S*H*, describes their collaboration below:

It is as daunting to fashion a successful Broadway musical as it would have been to housebreak a dinosaur.

Any one of the countless human and mechanical details that can go wrong unerringly—or, more accurately, erringly—

will. During its previews, the ship in Titanic (the musical, not the movie) refused to sink.

Given the perils and pitfalls of the theater, creators of musicals cherish every bit of encouragement, every scrap of support that comes their way, real or imagined, sincere or not.

Which takes me back to a run-through of the 1962 original production of A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.. Several weeks prior to its New York opening, at a bare-stage, costume-less performance for an invited audience of mainly theater professionals, the very first reaction came from Steve's close friend, the playwright Arthur Laurents, who pronounced the show sensational. Just the gantry to send one's spirit soaring.

The production moved on to New Haven [Connecticut]. It didn't play. There was lots to be changed, added, subtracted. Arthur appeared and assured us that the show was absolutely marvelous.

Next stop: Washington, D.C. Reviews: disastrous. Traveling from New York to catch a performance, Arthur said to forget the critics, and that the show was extraordinary.

We slaved over more changes in preparation for a week of previews in New York. Arthur attended one, and said the show was glorious.

The changes went on.

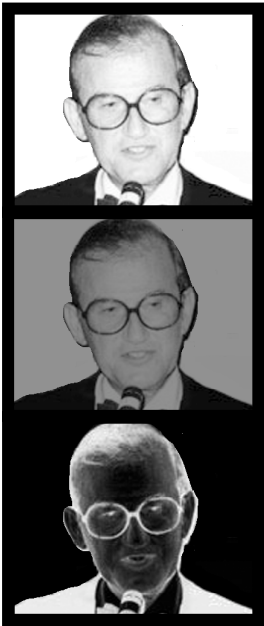
Opening night on Broadway, the final curtain fell to thunderous applause. The audience response was electric, ecstatic.

Arthur Laurents was the first of the first-nighters to proclaim what a fabulous musical Forum was.

I thanked him for his unfailing support, expressed my gratitude for his always being on hand to say how much he liked the show.

His shining smile was a beacon of sincerity.

"And this time I mean it", he answered.



SS

IT'S GREEK (OR LATIN) TO ME

Although much of the humor in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* is based in the fast-paced **PHYSICAL** comedy of farce, **VERBAL** jokes abound as well. One of the best **EXAMPLES** can be found in the names of the characters. Every character name contains a Greek or Latin word **ELEMENT** whose meaning **INDICATES** something **SIGNIFICANT** about that individual's personality. For **EXAMPLE**:

PROLOGUS= *prologue*

THE PROTEANS= *changing, from Proteus, the Greek sea god who changed shape at will*

SENEX= *old, aged, old man, from the title for Senators*

DOMINA= *lady, mistress*

HERO= *hero*

HYSTERIUM= *womb + disease, from the ancient belief that **EXTREME** emotions were caused by **DISTURBANCES** in the womb*

PSEUDOLUS= *false, to lie*

TINTINNABULA= *to jingle, to ring*

PANACEA= *all-healing cure*

THE GEMINAE= *twinned, double, paired, half and half*

VIBRATA= *to turn, tremble*

GYMNASIA= *to **EXERCISE** naked*

PHILIA= **ABNORMAL** attraction to

ERRONIUS= *wandering, straying*

MILES GLORIOSUS= *soldier, warrior, knight + glorious, full of glory*

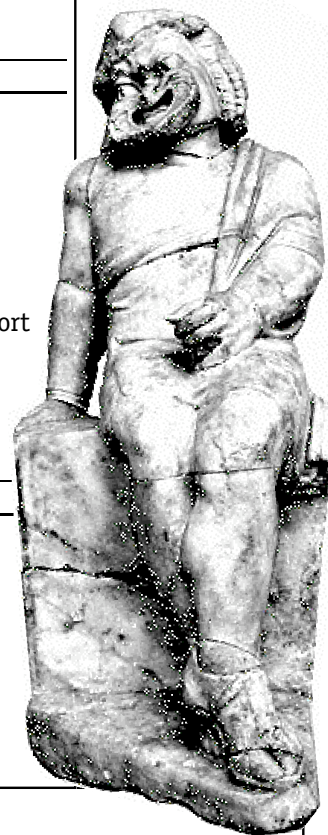
THESE WERE LANGUAGES used by ancient Romans, and as the Roman empire **EXPANDED** across Europe, Latin, in particular, spread with it. Eventually, different regions **DEVELOPED** their own **VARIATIONS** on the "invader" tongue, **PRODUCING** what are commonly thought of as the romance "sister" languages Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. With William, Duke of Normandy's 1066 conquering of England, French (and indirectly Latin) made its way into the English language. However, Latin terms also fed directly into English usage when Roman monks brought Christianity to England in the 500s, leading those in religious, **SCHOLARLY**, legal and **SCIENTIFIC** fields to borrow heavily from Latin, a **PRACTICE** that **CONTINUES** today. Additional Latin influences on English can be **ATTRIBUTED** to the 17th and 18th century belief that English was an **INHERENTLY** flawed language while Latin was a perfect one. In an effort to "fix" a faulty system, grammarians from this period **INVENTED** a number of English words with Latin derivatives, resulting in many word **ELEMENTS** that are **RECOGNIZABLE** in contemporary English. For a quick course in Latin and Greek, **REVIEW** the tables of **PREFIXES** and root words that follow.



LATIN ROOTS AND PREFIXES

LATIN ROOT	BASIC MEANING	EXAMPLE WORDS
-dict	to say	contradict, dictate, diction, edict, predict
-duc	to lead, bring, take	deduce, produce, reduce
-gress	to walk	digress, progress, transgress
-ject	to throw	eject, inject, interject, project, reject, subject
-pel	to drive	compel, dispel, impel, repel, propel
-pend	to hang	append, depend, impend, pendant, pendulum
-port	to carry	comport, deport, export, import, report, support
-scrib-, -script	to write	describe, prescribe, prescription, transcribe
-tract-	to pull, drag, draw	attract, detract, extract, retract, traction
-vert-	to turn	convert, divert, invert, revert

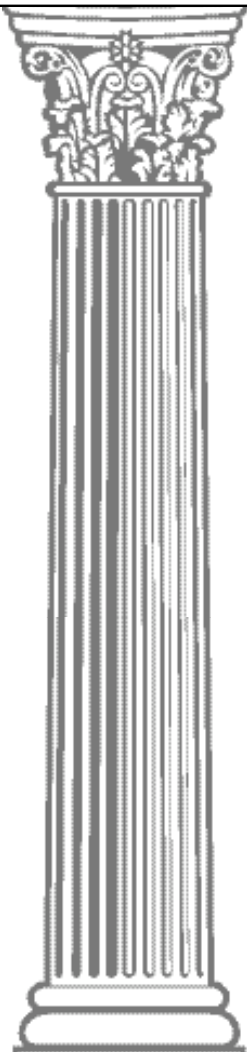
LATIN PREFIX	BASIC MEANING	EXAMPLE WORDS
co-	together	coauthor, coedit,
de-	away, off	deactivate, defrost
dis-	not, not any	disbelief, disrespect
non-	not	nonessential, nonviolent
post-	after	postdate, postwar
pre-	before	preconceive, prepay, prevent
sub-	under	submarine, subway



GREEK ROOTS AND PREFIXES

GREEK ROOT	BASIC MEANING	EXAMPLE WORDS
-anthrop-	human	philanthropy, anthropomorphic
-chron-	time	anachronism, chronic, chronicle, synchronize,
-dem-	people	democracy, demography
-morph-	form	amorphous, metamorphic, morphology
-path-	feeling, suffering	empathy, sympathy, apathy, psychopathic
-pedo-, -ped-	child, children	pediatrician, pedagogue
-phil-	having a strong affinity or love for	philanthropy, philharmonic, philosophy
-phon-	sound	telephone, cacophony, phonetics

GREEK PREFIX	BASIC MEANING	EXAMPLE WORDS
a-, an-	without	achromatic, amoral, atypical, anaerobic
anti-, ant-	opposite, opposing	anticrime, antipollution, antacid
auto-	self, same	autobiography, automatic, autopilot
bio-, bi-	life, living organism	biology, biophysics, biotechnology, biopsy
geo-	Earth; geography	geography, geomagnetism, geophysics,
hyper-	excessive, excessively	hyperactive, hypercritical, hypersensitive
micro-	small	microcosm, micronucleus, microscope
mono-	one, single, alone	monochrome, monosyllable, monoxide
neo-	new, recent	neonatal, neophyte, neoconservatism,
pan-	all	panorama, panchromatic, pandemic,
therm-	heat	thermal, thermometer, thermostat



MUST SEE TV

(THEATRE VIEWING, THAT IS)

With *Extreme Makeover*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and *Extreme Makeover: How'd They Do That?* topping the ratings charts and another spin-off series, *Extreme Makeover: Wedding Edition*, in the works, it is clear that what reigns in the entertainment industry is—well, extreme. Researchers agree that one of the driving forces of the never-ending flood of reality programming is viewers' desire to watch real people experience dramatic change, ranging from the lowest lows to the highest highs and everything in between. According to translator and academic J Michael Walton, viewing habits haven't changed much in the last 2000 plus years, though. Flashback—okay—way back:

Sometime around 254 B.C., in the tiny mountain village of Sarsina high in the Apennines of Umbria, ancient Rome's best-known playwright was born—Titus Maccius Plautus. Born 'Plautus' or 'splay-foot', he apparently managed to escape his backwoods village at a young age—perhaps by joining one of the itinerant theatrical troupes which commonly traveled from village to village performing short boisterous farces.

We know, however, that at some point the young Plautus gave up his acting career to become a Roman soldier, and this is probably when he was exposed to the delights of the Greek stage, specifically Greek New Comedy and the plays of Menander. Sometime later, he tried his hand as a merchant, but rashly trusted his wares to the sea and at the age of 45, he found himself penniless and reduced to a wandering miller, trudging through the streets with a hand-mill, grinding corn for householders.

*Meanwhile, translations of Greek New Comedy had come into vogue and Plautus—who remembered the comedies of Menander from his days as a soldier in Southern Italy—decided to try his hand at writing for the stage. His earliest plays, *Addictus* and *Saturio*, were written while he still made a living with his hand-mill. Soon, however, his comedies began to suit the public taste and Plautus was able to retire his hand-mill and devote himself to writing full-time.*

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Plautus' plays were no mere translation of Menander. He adapted the rough and tumble colloquy of the environments he knew best—the military camp and the marketplace—wild and boisterous like the Roman farces he may have performed in as a young man.

In those days, plays were never performed alone. They were presented at public celebrations and had to compete with chariot races, horse races, boxing matches and circuses. Since a close translation of a play by the refined Menander would hold little interest for a rowdy Roman crowd, Plautus quickly parted company with the Greek original. He generally took only the outline of the plot, the characters and selected segments of dialogue—then stepped out on his own. His objective was to entertain. At all costs, he kept the pot of action boiling, the stream of gags and puns and cheap slapstick flowing. Anything to make the audience laugh and keep them from peeking in on the boxing match nextdoor! To this end, Plautus often included scenes in song and dance. Unfortunately, the

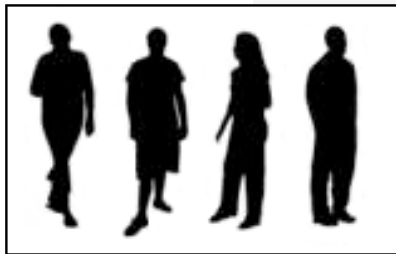
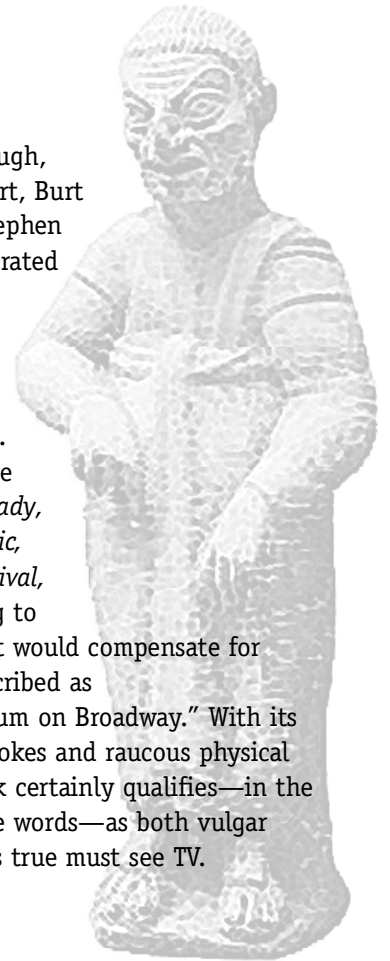


musical accompaniments to his plays have now been lost.

In all, Plautus composed approximately 130 pieces—21 of which have survived to this day. He was eventually granted citizenship and given permission to assume three names like a true-born Roman. The name he chose for himself was Titus Maccius ('clown') Plautus.

Plautus' works have been adapted by many later playwrights. His *Amphitryon* was the basis for Giraudoux's *Amphitryon* 38. *Menaechmi* or *The Menaechmus Twins* inspired, among others, Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* and Rodgers and Hart's *The Boys from Syracuse*. *The Pot of Gold* became Moliere's *The Miser*. And *Pseudolus*, *Casina*, *The Haunted House* and several other plays were combined in...A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.

Interestingly enough, when Larry Gelbart, Burt Shevelove and Stephen Sondheim collaborated to write *Forum*, they were trying to distinguish their work from the crowd as well. Surrounded by the likes of *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, *Camelot* and *Carnival*, they were looking to stage a piece that would compensate for what Gelbart described as "a vulgarity vacuum on Broadway." With its playfully bawdy jokes and raucous physical humor, their work certainly qualifies—in the best senses of the words—as both vulgar and extreme. It is true must see TV.



- ▶ WHAT DOES a television show, movie or play have to do to capture your attention?
- ▶ WHAT DO YOU THINK makes us enjoy watching other people experience extreme highs and lows?
- ▶ WHAT DO YOU THINK is the "next big thing" for entertainment? Will extreme reality programming take over or will something different take its place?
- ▶ DO YOU THINK, as many television executives claim, they are simply giving the public what it wants with current extreme programming, or are they creating a market for a cheaply produced product? Simply put, who decides what is entertainment: the audiences or the producers?



RBL



THE HOUSE LIGHTS in the theatre dim; as the first chords of the musical score are sounded by the orchestra, the curtain rises to reveal a world called “musical theatre.” The next five or ten minutes are crucial, for it is during this time, referred to in Broadway jargon as “the opening number,” that the creators of the piece must reach out to the audience and draw it into this rarefied world. The opening number will set the style, the tone, the mood for what follows. Most importantly, a good opening number will state what an audience is going to witness and how this story will be told.

STEPHEN SONDHEIM can arguably be considered the finest composer/lyricist currently writing for the American musical theatre. Over the course of some 30 odd years and 15 produced works, written solely by himself or in collaboration with others, he has fine-tuned the art and skill necessary to create an opening number that succinctly states the theme and style of the show which will develop from it. Through an examination of the beginning sequences of many of his works, one may more fully understand how this delicate and often mysterious balancing act can be achieved.

WITH HIS very first solo venture, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Sondheim hit the bull’s eye with the rollicking “Comedy Tonight.” The title itself categorically defines the essence of this musical farce inspired by the plays of the ancient comic writer, Plautus. The song’s straightforward lyrics (“Something familiar/Something peculiar...Old situations/New complications...”) and bouncing rhythm reminiscent of burlesque or vaudeville make the audience immediately aware that low pranks are waiting around each bend of the musical’s complicated plot twists. Furthermore, the brash, brassy tone of “Comedy Tonight” establishes a musical style which perfectly complements the zaniness of *Forum*’s book and its source

material. This style, begun in the opening number, subsequently permeates the entire score, most notably in songs like “Free” and “Everybody Ought to Have a Maid.”

IT IS PERHAPS significant to note that “Comedy Tonight” was the third opening song written for *Forum*. Two others, “Love Is in the Air” and “Invocation,” were discarded prior to the musical’s Broadway premiere. Craig Zadan in *Sondheim & Co.* reveals that the show’s creators, Sondheim, Larry Gelbart, and Burt Shevelev, judged the former song to be too melodically lilting and lyrically whimsical and the latter not to be—as the musical’s director, George Abbott, so tersely put it—“hummable.” For these reasons, the production team opted for “Comedy Tonight,” an opening number that would more accurately convey both the style and substance of the low comedy to follow.

ONE CAN READILY deduce that, even in this early stage of his development, Sondheim realized the vital importance of a strong opening sequence. Whatever their individual flaws, the majority of his subsequent works feature opening numbers that possess strong, clear statements of both style and purpose. By surveying Sondheim’s body of work from *Forum* to his more recent score for *Assassins*, one can discover distinct structural patterns which aid in his creation of effective opening sequences. This musical community commences to set the agenda for the story and issues to be developed.

THROUGHOUT the vast body of Stephen Sondheim’s work, the composer deliberately attempts to create opening numbers which draw a precise blueprint from which to build an entire score. Through his superb artistry and craftsmanship, he demonstrates that opening numbers need not resort to a kick-line of chorus girls in order to lure an audience into its musical comedy universe.

*Excerpted from “The Opening Numbers”
by Ray Schultz*

10

RESISTING SLAVERY IN ANCIENT ROME

BY PROFESSOR KEITH BRADLEY

PROBABLY OVER A QUARTER of the people living under ancient Roman rule were slaves—but they were kept so suppressed, there is little known about them. Keith Bradley looks for clues to the lives they led—and describes how some of them managed to get their own back on their masters.



The idea of resistance

A ROMAN SENATOR named Pupius Piso once ordered his slaves not to speak unless spoken to. He had no time for idle talk. He also arranged an elegant dinner-party at which the guest of honour was to be a dignitary named Clodius ‘... psychological warfare...always existed between master and slave.’ At the appropriate time all the guests arrived except Clodius. So Piso sent the slave responsible for having invited the guest of honour to see where he was—several times—but still Clodius did not appear. In despair Piso finally questioned the slave: ‘Did you send Clodius an invitation?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘So why hasn’t he come?’ ‘Because he declined.’ ‘Then why didn’t you tell me earlier?’ ‘Because you didn’t ask.’

THIS ANECDOTE was recorded, about AD 100, by the Greek moralist Plutarch. It is a story that presupposes a constant tension between slave and master in the ancient Roman world, and is a striking illustration of how a lowly Roman slave could outwit his superior master. Technically Roman slaves were the property, the chattels, of their owners, held in a state of total subjection. But to outwit an owner as Piso’s slave did was to win a victory in the game of psychological warfare that always existed between master and slave. For unlike other forms of property, slaves were human beings with minds of their own, and they didn’t always obey their owners as unthinkingly as they were supposed to. They had the capacity to resist

the absolute authority their owners formally exercised, and when Piso’s slave crushingly embarrassed his master by obeying his instructions to the letter, for a moment (at least) he placed Piso in the inferior position that he normally occupied himself. He found, in other words, a way to assert himself, to exert power against the powerful, so that the asymmetrical roles of master and slave were suddenly inverted.

Day-to day resistance

RUNNING AWAY was less dangerous than rebellion, but it was still a hazardous enterprise. Slave-catchers apart, Roman law forbade the harbouring of fugitives, so slaves on the run were always in danger and if caught could be savagely punished. To many therefore it must have made sense not to risk life and limb by running away, but to carry out acts of wilful obstruction or sabotage that harmed slave-owners’ interests at minimal risk to themselves. Those in positions of responsibility might falsify record books, and embezzle money from their owners, or arrange for their own manumission (setting free). Ordinary farm labourers might deliberately go slow on the job, or injure the animals they worked with to avoid work—or they might pretend to be ill, destroy equipment, or damage buildings. If your job was to make wine and you had to produce a certain quota, why not add in some sea-water to help things along? Almost any slave could play truant or simply waste time. All these petty forms of day-to-day resistance



read more on pg. 12

SWDXT?

***"I'll never move until I'm free!
Such a little word, but oh,
The difference it makes."***

Pseudolus' quest for freedom is an amusing one, but it is a valid pursuit. How does the Roman concept of democracy vary from the republic that we live in today?

***"I'm lovely,
All I am is lovely,
Lovely is the one thing I can do...
But I'm happy
Merely being lovely"***

Philia, though not particularly bright, has a very clear understanding of her role in life. Is she right to simply accept the label the world has applied to her and behave accordingly, or should she try to move beyond such surface concerns?

***"For us there will never be happiness"
"We will have to learn to be happy
without it."***

Philia's response to Hero is hilariously naïve, or is it? Is it possible for us to train ourselves to enjoy life without people, things, or positions that we want? If so, how do we do this and with what result?

***"Son, if you are only as happy as
your mother and I—my heart will
bleed for you."***

Although *Forum* comes to a relatively happy ending with all the right couples united and the wrong ones divided, what do you think Senex's parting "blessing" for his son suggests about the institution of marriage? Do you think that this view is accurate?

***"What's the moral?
Must be a moral.
Here is the moral, wrong or right:
Morals tomorrow!
Comedy, comedy, comedy, comedy,
comedy, comedy,
Comedy, comedy,
Tonight!"***

Though funny, this is not the conventional bit of light wisdom that we often expect at the end of a musical comedy. What do you make of it? Is there a moral and if so, what is it?

RESISTING SLAVERY continues

appealed to Roman slaves. They allowed slaves to frustrate and annoy their owners, and offered the satisfaction of knowing that their owners' powers were not absolute—that even the most humble of human beings could take action to empower themselves. But it was in the decisions they made to cause vexation that slaves most forcefully expressed their humanity, and their opposition to the institution that oppressed them. Their sporadic acts of defiance created a permanent undercurrent of low-level resistance to slavery that was deeply embedded in Roman society. The slaves were motivated not by a sense of class solidarity—Rome's slave population was far too heterogeneous for that—but by the desire to find ways in which, as individuals,

they could find relief from their subject status, if only temporarily. The relationship between slaves and masters at Rome was a contest fought in the arena of the mind. Masters could draw on all the weapons of law, status and established authority—there was never in Roman history any movement to abolish slavery—whereas slaves had little more to fight with than their wits. But as Plutarch's story symbolically shows, the lines of battle had to be constantly redrawn, as slaves matched their will against the will of those who owned them. And it was not always the masters who won.

From www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/slavery_01.shtml