THEATER REVIEW

Centre Stage's 'Forum' resounds with laughter

By Paul Hyde
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Theatrical lightning can strike twice.

Todd Weir, reprising a role he performed to great acclaim in Greenville 12 years ago, is once again an electrifying comedic presence in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," running through April 21 at Centre Stage.

Weir, one of the Upstate's most talented actors, dominates the stage with verve, aplomb and ear-to-ear grins as the master of revels, Pseudolus, in this wackiest of musical comedies.

Composer Stephen Sondheim's show, set in ancient Rome, centers on the slave Pseudolus' attempts to win his freedom by helping his young master Hero woo the beautiful courtesan Philia. She, however, already has been sold to a military champion.

The uproarious book is by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart. Sondheim offers some catchy tunes, the best-known being the opener, "Comedy Tonight."

Under the broad direction of John Fagan, this "Forum" is a bawdy, over-the-top Roman romp.

Don't expect nuance or poignancy. The show, which opened Thursday, is propelled by witty one-liners, copious sight gags and much frantic running about.

Fagan wrings every ounce of silliness out of this boisterous farce.

In my review 12 years ago of Weir's performance (at Greenville Little Theatre then), I said Weir was Greenville's answer to Broadway's Nathan Lane. That still holds true.

Many others deserve accolades as well.

Brady Smith is terrific as the tightly wound slave Hysterium, with an almost perpetual look of wide-eyed panic on his face. Smith delivers Hysterium's feverish song "I'm Calm" with crisp irony.

Chelsea Atkins is radiant in voice and appearance as the ditzy courtesan Philia. Rafe Holt plays her swain, Hero, with the perfect touch of callow appeal.

Peter Simms embraces the role of the military leader Miles Gloriosus with gusto.

Richard Beveridge offers a deft contribution as the henpecked Senex and Taylor Randall is suitably brassy as Senex's wife, Domina.

David Bean relishes the role of the smarmy Marcus Lycus, procurer of courtesans. Peter Haloulos is endearingly befuddled as the aged Erronius.

Three nimble jesters — Phyllis Jackson, Chris Rose and Daniel Marlatt — play the actors-of-all-trades known as the Proteans.

The other courtesans, voguing and pouring on the glam, are Sarah Rutzen, Cristina Dixson, Clarka Wickliffe, Sara Tolson and Tiffany Morton.

Vaughn Newman Jr. choreographed the breezy dances. Credit for the tight musical preparation goes to Susan Lyle.

For tickets to Centre Stage's supremely zany "Forum," call 864-233-6733.

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