

# A Funny THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM

## **Director's Vision**

By Ted Pappas

### **What is your vision for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*?**

The theatrical pedigree of *Forum* is remarkable. The show is a virtual history of stage comedy from ancient times to the present day. The musical's authors, veterans of the legitimate stage as well as the Golden Age of television comedy, have used as their initial inspiration three of the plays of Plautus, the comic genius of ancient Roman theater. It is from Plautus that we inherit the character of the wily slave (Pseudolus) who outsmarts his "betters," as well as the steroidal, pompous military man (Miles Gloriosus) whose self-assessment is definitive: "I am a parade!" Add to that original source material the raucous free-for-all spirit of vaudeville, the frisky shenanigans of burlesque, and the disciplined, plot-driven style of the Broadway musical, and you find yourself face-to-face with the funniest and most exuberant musical comedy ever devised.

My vision of the show is to honor the intent of the authors and composer, Messrs. Gelbart, Shevelove, and Sondheim, as well as the show's original director, the great George Abbott. The actors and I hope to unleash every possible and appropriate comic element available from bawdy one-liners to unexpected pratfalls, from nearsighted old men mistaking a plucked chicken for a baby to showgirls strutting their stuff on the runway. Our goal is to fill the Opera House with wall-to-wall laughter and delight!

### **Why do you think Goodspeed audiences will enjoy the show?**

Everyone is looking for a good laugh these days, and no musical provides more belly-laughs, line for line, than *Forum*. But the show is much more than a comedy machine. It is a meticulously crafted play with music, boasting a plethora of outrageous but well-defined characters, and a delightful score by Stephen Sondheim, the undisputed master of the American musical theater.

### **Tell us about the cast – how you chose them and what the audience can expect to see.**

*Forum* is unique as a Broadway musical in that it boasts five featured roles for "character men", not the typical young leading man of musical theater. These "character" roles—Hysterium, Senex, Marcus Lycus, Erronius, and, above all, Pseudolus—need to be played by five actors with star quality and a palpable connection to the baggy-pants comic tradition of days gone by. In other words, they need to be both actors and clowns. In casting *Forum* the most daunting task is finding this perfect quintet. I am pleased to report that after weeks, nay months, of auditions we have done just that.

Leading the charge as Pseudolus is the remarkable Adam Heller, the ringmaster of the evening's proceedings. Hysterium, his cohort in mayhem, is played by the equally charismatic John Scherer, a great favorite of Goodspeed audiences. The line-up is completed by the irrepressible actor/comedian David Wohl as Senex, the alarmingly funny Ron Wisniski as Marcus Lycus, and the one-and-only Mark Baker as Erronius. The rest of the cast is a director's dream come true, each one chosen for their acting skills, their vocal and dancing prowess, and that rarest of all qualities: magnetism. There are 18 actors in all, but if you don't check your playbills too closely, you will swear that there is a cast of thousands—well, dozens at least.