

arts & culture

Smash Productions Brings the Comedy In Upcoming Musical

The troupe will present "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" April 2-4 at Savannah Center.

By MICHAEL FORTUNA
Daily Sun Staff Writer

Hold on to your funny bones. They're going to get a workout during Smash Production's latest show.

The resident theatrical troupe is rehearsing "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," the hit musical with a book by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart and music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim that took the ancient Greek plays of Plautus and turned them into a vaudeville/burlesque show.

"It's like a nonstop laugh-fest," said Bob Stehman, director of this production. "It's a great-escape show. It has great comic relief in the genius writing and the genius music in the show."

The group, which also features music director Mary Ann Rockenbach and choreographer Barb Byers, will present the musical at 7 p.m. April 2-4 and 2 p.m. April 3-4 at Savannah Center. Tickets are \$40 and up, and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thevillagesentertainment.com.

In the musical, Pseudolus (Tim Casey) is a crafty slave trying to win the hand of Philia (Jill Marrese) for his master, Hero (Bob Addante), in exchange for his freedom.

"He's a character through and through," Casey said. "He's always scheming and plotting, coming up with ways of working people to his advantage."

"(Philia) is a relative innocent next to the many crazy characters," said Marrese, of the Village of Hadley.

It takes place in one day in ancient Rome in front of three homes: the houses of Senex (Tim Ruwart), Erronius (Barry Corlew) and Marcus Lycus (Gary Chubeck).

"All these houses become intertwined in the story," Stehman said. "The actors have to be able to sing and dance and be comic actors. Everybody's so funny in the show. That's what makes it so strong. For me, it's very exciting."



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Director of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"

The play doesn't employ any scene changes.

"In Act I, the story is continuous, the same in Act 2," said Stehman, of the Village of Bonita. "It flawlessly moves from one calamity to another."

"The songs in this show, they lead somewhere, they continue to tell the story," Marrese said. "There's comedy in every song."

Marrese first saw "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" back in the 1970s.

"(The musical) really holds up in today's world," Marrese said. "It's a great example of Greek comedy. It's one of the funniest shows I've seen."

She is making her first appearance in a Smash Productions show.

"I'm enjoying it immensely," Marrese said. "Bob is an absolute superb director. It's a happy cast."

Casey, who had seen the movie and stage versions of "Forum," is taking on the role played by Nathan Lane. Casey also played a role in "The Addams Family" that Lane had done.

"We seem to be simpatico on playing these kinds of characters," said Casey, of the Village of Chitty Chatty.

Stehman had seen the movie version of "Forum" when he was a child, and



Submitted photos

This promotional art shows Pseudolus, played by Tim Casey, surrounded by courtesans, clockwise from top left, Lila Ling, Kathy Chesley-Williams, Lori Bellit, Elizabeth Albrecht, Ying He and Bridget Wendt. Smash Productions' upcoming rendition of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," will be presented April 2-4 at Savannah Center.



Above left: Denis Milonas, from left, Tim Casey, Gary Chubeck and Tim Ruwart sing "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid" in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum." Above right: Hero, played by Bob Addante, gets ready for his first kiss from Philia, played by Jill Marrese, in the Smash Productions show.

he played Hysterium in another production about 30 years ago. He has been with Smash Productions from the beginning, directing six of its shows.

"I'm there at the beginning to give direction, to give ideas and my vision," Stehman said. "Then everybody in the cast and production team shares the vision and it's our show. We each bring our talents, build on that and become one."

Casey started acting in plays and musicals from the time he was 15. He also studied theater in college before majoring in television production. One of the reasons he came to The Villages was the theater community.

With Smash Productions, he's appeared in four of its shows, and he's appeared in numerous musicals in the area including "Beauty and the Beast," "Company," "Man of La Mancha" and "Spamalot."

Marrese worked as a professional accompanist for musical theater productions in Michigan, which soon led to acting in some shows.

"I wanted to audition for things, but I was told I was needed on the piano," she said. "As I got older, I thought, 'Maybe I can do this.' I have seen enough of (the actors) as a professional accompanist. I've had a lot of fun."

"The purpose of the arts is to make people feel something," she said. "The well-written and produced and acted musicals, they make an audience feel something. In this case, make them feel like laughing."

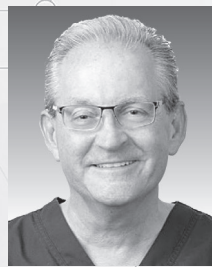
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Dr. Kevin Spohr earned his Medical Degree from Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine. He served as Chief Resident during his Dermatology Residency at Wellington Regional Medical Center in Wellington, Florida. He completed his Family Practice Residency at Florida Hospital in Orlando and practiced as a family practitioner for a number of years before advancing to his Dermatology specialty. Dr. Spohr is the Director of Dermatologic Surgery for KCU-GME Consortium Residency Program and is a member of the American Osteopathic Association, American Osteopathic College of Dermatology and American Society of Mohs Surgeons. He specializes in General Dermatology and Mohs Micrographic Surgery.

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