



Society : KAOS (Kingsbury Amateur Operatic Society)  
Production : A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum  
Date : 28<sup>th</sup> April 2010  
Venue : Kingsbury High School Theatre  
Report by : Harvey Kesselman

## Report

Written by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart (well known for the TV comedy MASH) with wonderful music by Stephen Sondheim, this excellent musical based on the farcical plays of the ancient Roman author Plautus was first performed in New York in May 1982 and ran for 964 performances. It starred Zero Mostel and Jack Gilford. They both later appeared in the film made in 1966 being the only two from the original stage production, Michael Crawford played Hero. The London production starring Frankie Howerd and Kenneth Connor opened in London in 1963 and ran for 762 performances. In 2004 a very good production was staged at the Olivier Theatre. The 1970's had the BBC television starting a new comedy programme "Up Pompeii" starring Frankie Howerd. This was obviously influenced by the musical and ran successfully for several years.

With a cast list of fifteen named characters this report will concentrate upon nine of the main principals. We had the two scheming servants, the lustful master, the rather simple hero (called Hero), the overbearing warrior and of course the heroine. **Mike Stevens** was obviously in his element as Pseudolus the conniving slave to Hero. All he wanted to do was to gain his freedom by getting his master 'fixed up' with Philia who, in spite of living in the house of Lycus, a procurer of courtesans, was being 'saved' for a great soldier. Mike sang and acted with great assurance and right from his opening number displayed a great deal of the humour the role required. He was well supported by **Irving Boxer** as his fellow 'conspirator' Hysterium, slave to Hero's parents Senex and Domina. Irving's 'I'm calm' when he obviously wasn't, was most amusing. They worked well together and their reprise of the 'Lovely' number in the second act was very funny, when Irving had to dress up as Philia, who had supposedly died of an unknown plague in order that the returning warrior would think 'his bride' was dead, he would then depart, leaving the field open for Hero. There were some wonderful numbers in this musical and it is difficult to mention them all, but one certainly stood out (in my opinion), 'Everybody Ought to Have a Maid' was a joy where Pseudolus, Hysterium and Lycus are joined by Senex and, as there is not a great deal for the whole company to do, the Director cleverly brought in whole chorus who joined with the principals in singing the last verse. It really did work and added to the fun of the number. **Roger Slater** was excellent as Senex, the master of Hysterium, trying almost desperately to get away from his domineering wife and hoping to start 'something' with Philia, who had mistakenly thought he was the warrior to whom she had been promised. His acting and delivery of dialogue was very amusing and the very funny duet with Hysterium, 'Impossible' was great. **Arlette Kamellard** was quite domineering as Domina, hence her name, endeavouring to keep her husband under control, but always suspecting him of 'wandering'. There was a wonderful scene with Miles Gloriosus with a lot of confusion on his part thinking she was the leading courtesan, when, in fact she was telling him about her father being a great general and the wonderful celebratory dinners she had organised. **Chris Eyre** could have been much more romantic as Hero. His duet with Philia, in the first act, was spoiled by his singing completely out of time with the orchestra. He seemed to make

little effort to correct this in spite of several opportunities during the accompaniment. Hopefully this problem did not occur in subsequent performances. There was a delightful performance by **Kayleigh Stocker** as Philia. She came over as being rather innocent about the ways of the (Roman) world and was quite willing to let her 'owner', Marcus Lycus, give her to that Great Warrior Miles Gloriosus, until she is wooed by Hero when she realises there was an alternative. **John Silverstone** was rightfully arrogant as The Great Warrior Miles Gloriosus. I loved his requesting a stool to stand on for his first meeting with Pseudolus so that he could 'tower' over the slave. His 'Bring Me My Bride' showed the disdain he had for the people he had to deal with and his reaction to the news of his bride's demise and the subsequent request for a funeral pyre to the dismay of Pseudolus and Hysterium, was indeed well done. As the buyer and seller of courtesans, **Cliff Hughes** was a suitably smooth operator trying his utmost to satisfy his customers, especially Miles, but was thwarted in his attempts by the two slaves. Literally running through the musical was Erronius, played breathlessly by **Terry Maginn**. The poor chap had been told by a pseudo soothsayer, Pseudolus, that he would only discover the whereabouts of his two lost children, stolen by pirates, by running around the seven hills of Rome seven times. He did not complete the task, but did find that, because they were both wearing rings bearing a gaggle of geese, Philia and Miles were indeed brother and sister, thus ensuring a happy ending with Philia and Hero becoming man and wife, Pseudolus obtaining his freedom and Miles Gloriosus getting the twin courtesans, The Geminae

As already mentioned, this report has concentrated on nine of the main principals, however there were many others who contributed to the success of this show. Particularly the courtesans who were all seductive and moved well. And they were: **Dianna Winny** as Tintinabula; **Penny Stevens**, Panacea (Latin for cure all), although I did wonder why she was the only courtesan whose costume, looking like a nurse's uniform with a red cross, was out of period; The Geminae, **Mary-Ann Allison** and **Daphne Rice**; **Juliet Edgar**, Vibrata; and **Vivienne Harrild** as Gymnasia. The Proteans all did a splendid job and the orchestra under the guidance of **James Hale** were excellent. There was some interesting choreography arranged by Lauren Stevens

I am always amazed at the sets this company produces and the one set for this production was excellent. It showed a street in Ancient Rome with the doors of Lycus on stage right, there was a window on the first floor where we first catch sight of Philia. Onstage left was seen the portico entrance to the house of Erronius. This set was designed by **David Antiss** and constructed by him, **Sue Briffett**, **Vic** and **Estelle Gossage** together with various members of KAOS. **Vic Guiver**, **Rob Harrild** and 'friends of Kaos' were the stage crew; Lighting Designer was **Andrew Bird** assisted by **Chris Bird**, **Martyn Jackson**, **Howard Lush**, **Deborah Maycraft**, **James Peck** and **Bernie Wallace**. Sound Design **Cliff Hughes** and **Richard Reece**. Make Up was in the capable hands of **Jean Lloyds**. Thanks go to **Lewis Selby** for his kind attention.

My final words are to congratulate **Richard Reece**, who directed what I felt was certainly one of the best shows I have seen this company perform. It was a great evenings entertainment and I do hope the subsequent performances (we were there on the first night) were equally successful.