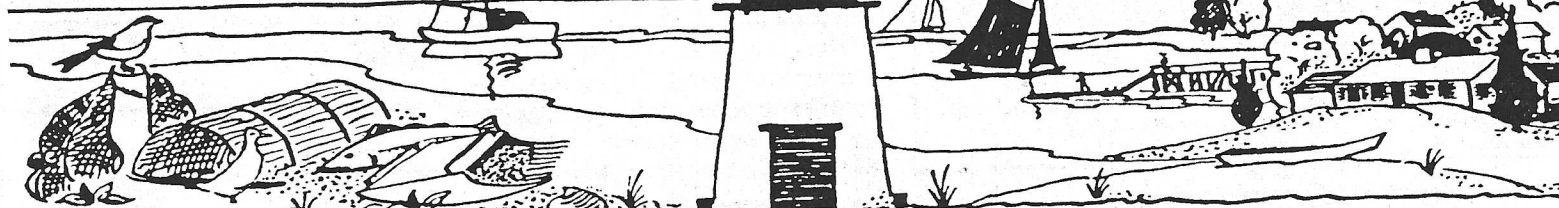


THE CAPE CODDER



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COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER COMPANY

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3 Sections

Stages mounts rollicking 'Comedy of Errors'

THEATER Review

By Leslie Meier

Stages Theatre Company's production of Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors" takes the notion that Shakespearean drama must consist of flowery language pronounced in a plummy English accent and turns it on its ear. This is a rowdy, bawdy, lively show that has more in common with Larry, Curly and Moe than Larry Olivier.

The source of the play is an ancient Roman tale about two identical twins, both named Antipholus, who were separated at birth. Shakespeare takes the original concept a step further by adding a second set of twins, both named Dromio, to double the fun and the confusion. The story opens in Ephesus, where Egeon, the father of the Antipholi, has been sentenced to death for violating a rule barring entry to citizens from the rival town of Syracuse. Doug Velie plays the tragic role of the condemned man who is searching for his lost sons with genuine feeling and Brother Stephen Velie has great dignity as Solinus, the ruling Duke of Ephesus.

Also violating the ban is Antipholus of Syracuse, who unbeknownst to his father is also in Ephesus, searching for his lost family, accompanied by his servant Dromio. As it happens, his brother Antipholus is a respected citizen in Ephesus, and he also has a servant named Dromio. The mix-ups begin when Antipholus of Syracuse, played with great vigor by Luke Norman, mistakes Dromio of Ephesus for his own servant and thwacks him mightily with a noisy leather strap to the great amusement of the audience, especially the children.

Both of the Dromios, played by Brad Lussier and Dave Haig, are clowns. Lussier has the larger role and he plays it with relish, at one point distributing tissues to the audience so they can join in his crocodile tears. Another highlight is a scene in which they have a noisy farting contest, again to the delight of the youngsters in the audience. Dan Ford is Antipholus of Ephesus, and Ellen Ortolani has a plum of a part as his shrewish, and very funny, wife. Her efforts to seduce the wrong Antipholus are hilarious, but it is Rachel McKendree as her demure sister, Luciana, who wins his heart.

Director Joanna Weir-Ouston gets terrific performances from

her cast of amateur actors, who deliver long and complicated speeches as if they'd been doing it all their lives. The meaning is always clear, even when the words aren't, thanks to plenty of visual comic action. Imaginative staging and colorful dance numbers, with live musical accompaniment by Tim McKendree, Sister Brigid Minor, Kyle Norman, Sister Seana Shannon and Sister Dominique Velie, guarantee there's never a dull moment.

This presentation of "The Comedy of Errors" is a great introduction to Shakespeare for young children, but sophisticated theatergoers will also find it enjoyable because Weir-Ouston uses authentic details to capture the exuberant spirit of Elizabethan drama. If Shakespeare himself walked into Paraclete House, he might think he was back in the Globe Theater.

If you go...

What: "The Comedy of Errors" by William Shakespeare presented by Stages Theatre Company

When: 7:30 p.m. July 30

Where: Paraclete House, Rock Harbor, Orleans, 508-240-2400

SUNDAY CAPE COD TIMES

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Bard's 'Comedy' leaves audience in stitches

By **FREDERICK MELO**
STAFF WRITER

ORLEANS – Budget theater and the bard don't easily mesh. After all, with Shakespeare's gift for scrunching layers of meaning into dense, unrhymed verse, it's little wonder classically trained

talents spend years specializing in this stuff.

Theater REVIEW

But when polished actors team with less-polished thespians to make iambic pentameter funny, it's refreshing to behold. Director Joanna Weir-Ouston draws on both camps for a creative, high-energy rendition of Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors," turning foul fair and leaving audiences in stitches. Even with a 400-year-old script, Errors gets it right.

The show is held at the Stages Theatre Company, the Cape's hidden jewel of a drama house, located at the Community of Jesus campus in Orleans. But not to worry. Weir-Ouston, who teaches at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, stays true to the bard's bawdiness with saucy harlots, boffo slaps on hapless servants, and even a pinch or two of toilet humor.

The church-based theater com-

On Stage

■ **What:** "The Comedy of Errors"

■ **Presented by:** Stages Theatre Company

■ **Written by:** William Shakespeare

■ **When:** 7:30 tonight, Thursday and Friday

■ **Where:** Paraclete House, 17 Anchor Drive, Rock Harbor, Orleans

■ **Tickets:** \$30; \$25 for 65 and older; free for 18 and under

■ **Reservations:** 508-240-2400

pany uses a combination of visiting professionals, in-house talent and everyday enthusiasts to give the production broad appeal. This is a thinking performance, and there's not a lazy actor in sight.

It's funny on its own merits when an angry abbess in a penquin-perfect habit makes a sudden entrance, stopping the on-stage antics cold. But add the fact that the actress is Sister Danielle Dwyer, the company's co-founder and executive director,

and you've got an excellent joke. Look around the audience at the nuns laughing through tears, and the layers of humor would make the bard swoon.

As for the plot twists, thank heavens for the program notes. Years ago, a set of identical twin boys, both named Antipholus, became separated in a ship disaster shortly after birth. The boys are raised apart, each served by clownish, adopted slaves named Dromio, who are also long-lost twins.

When the two brothers, accompanied by their jester-companions, unknowingly land within spitting distance of each other in the bustling port city of Ephesus, things get a little Hayley Mills. Adrianna, the sultry but shrewish wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, is eager to find her errant husband and bring him home for dinner, in all senses of the word.

Her come-ons are well received by a pleasantly surprised Antipholus of Syracuse, who is only too happy to feast. But he

also suffers hunger pangs for her more servile, virginal sister, Luciana. Add parents, prison guards, religious zealots and unpaid debts, and an already mixed-up day turns into, well, a comedy of errors.

As the Dromio twins, artistic director David Haig and Brad Lussier are hilarious show-stealers, and Ellen Ortolani hits Adrianna at the right pitch.

But the contrast between the sisters isn't deep enough. Arguably the play's most important dialogue – a repartee between Luciana and the libido-driven Antipholus over lust and duty, masculine desire and feminine virtue, marriage and sex – feels frantic and rushed, rather than seductive.

The irony here should be that virtuous Luciana is tempted by the carnal spontaneity of her sister's supposed husband. And libidinous, hot-tempered Adrianna, as we later see, is a forgiving wife fully committed to her marriage.

