

UPSTAGE

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Rodgers and Hart's

THE

BOYS

FROM

Syracuse

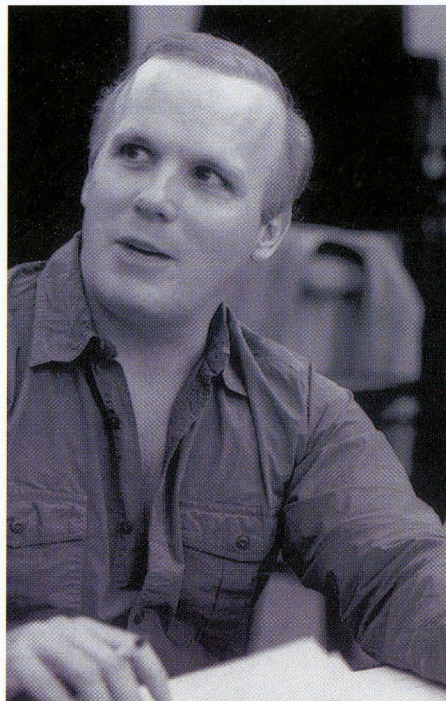




Oh Boy, Oh Boy!

THE DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Director Scott Ellis shares some thoughts about staging *The Boys from Syracuse* at Roundabout Theatre Company.



Director, Scott Ellis. Photo: David Nicolas

A MUSICAL COMEDY CLASSIC

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart were a very successful musical comedy team--Rodgers was the composer, Hart was the lyricist--during the 1920s and 30s. After several successes like *On Your Toes*, *Babes in Arms*, and *I Married an Angel*, they got the idea to adapt Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, which is set in ancient Greece and features two sets of twins. Rodgers and Hart approached George Abbott to write the script for them, and Abbott was so taken by the idea, he directed and produced the show as well.

When we decided to produce *Boys from Syracuse* at Roundabout, we wanted a new book writer. The original script by George Abbott, was quite wonderful and

very topical for its time, but it was written a long time ago. Our new version follows basically the same story and the same idea, but the characters are different, they're more contemporary. Nicky Silver has written the twins as very different people, as individuals. I totally support that approach, because I'm an identical twin and I think I'm very different from my brother. We also rearranged some things in the script to tell the story in a more interesting way.

SEARCHING

The idea of searching for someone who completes you is central to this play. Being a twin I understand this. If you know you have a twin and that twin is gone, you're just not whole. It's like a part of you that's not there. You have to search for that person. This play also looks at the search for love. The twins are involved in some sort of romantic search--finding a new love, re-igniting the flame of an old love--and by the end everyone has found a new person in their life.

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COVER:
Artwork for the Roundabout Theatre Company production of *The Boys From Syracuse*

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COMEDY TYPES

The play has many classic comic types and comic situations, but as a director, I have to find truth in it no matter what the style of play. In fact, with comedy it's even more difficult, because the stakes are usually much higher. Actors and directors have to find truth in the moments of the play, or it's not funny. It's only funny when you see someone going after something desperately, honestly, and not being able to get it.

REHEARSING THE PLAY

Rehearsal is a big puzzle. Some times, you think it's going to work, but in rehearsal you realize, "Oh it doesn't work as well." I've learned that a director has to go in thinking he knows what the play is going to feel like, but he has to be open for it to all change. For example, there's a scene in the tailor shop, where Nicky Silver wrote the typical farce scene with characters going in and out of doors. At first, in rehearsal it was going well, but

then I said to Nicky, "It's not enough. We need more. Not enough happens, and it's over too quickly." So he wrote more, and he had to find reasons why those doors were opening again, which was very, very difficult. But he did a great job. That's a perfect example of something that was working at first and had to go further. We would never have known that until we staged it and watched it.

It's hard for people to understand what a director does to break down a scene. For example, if you have two actors on stage, you have to break down the scene to make it work. You have to understand what the obstacles are, what the intentions are, what the characters are doing at the time, and so forth. That's a lot of work. When it's done correctly, it looks easy and real. People will then ask, "Well, what did the director do?" A good director is there to help guide you. There's nothing on that stage the director hasn't okayed. ■



Dressing the Part

THE COSTUME DESIGNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Costume designer Martin Pakledinaz was interviewed by *UPSTAGE* in his design studio, and graciously supplied *UPSTAGE* with some of his costume renderings.

UPSTAGE: Since this musical is a 1938 adaptation of a Shakespearean comedy, set in Ancient Greece, how did you approach researching the world of the play?

Martin: I did some visual research on Greek clothing. There aren't any existing samples of it; we only have what was depicted on vase paintings or statues, and that tends to be highly idealized. The vase paintings are interesting since they show different people from different countries together. You'll see a toga on one guy, and next to him, you see the foreign invaders with legging and tights and the short, little skirts.

We also researched the 1930s and 1940s, and old theatre productions to see how other people have dealt with the costumes for this play.

There was a designer named Madam Grés, who was a fabulous French designer, and who was always draping Greek-style gowns for society women. One of Adriana's gowns in the play is based on the concept of Madam Grés' clothing (but not based directly on one of her dresses). Luckily in the late 1930s and 40s, designers were drawing on what they considered the "classical" feeling in the drapery of their dresses for women. So actually, there were a lot of ideas to pull from.



Costume design for Dromio of Syracuse by Martin Pakledinaz.

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(Left to Right)
 Costume designs for the Tailor, Antipholus of Ephesus, and a Courtesan by Martin Pakledinaz.

Continued from page 2.

They were playing with the peplums on the dress [folds of fabrics attached at the waistline], and they were playing with gathering in the skirts and things like that.

Of course, you have to realize that you are in 2002, looking back at that time. Even if you don't think you are influencing the interpretation, you are influenced by your times. Maybe it's even the fact

that we have fabrics that no one would have used before. You take all that in consideration and you start finding your own form.

How did you develop some key concepts to help you make your design choices?

I took a clue from the journey that Tom Lynch was taking creating the set design. He would do something realistic, then simplify it and then simplify it even more. I wanted something visually simple and pure. It's a really sweet piece that you shouldn't burden down with too much. Other things I kept in mind were that it's Greek, it's comical, it's not real, and it's artificial. I also faced the challenge of dressing twins who physically don't look like each other, so I have to make it easy for the audience, to keep their eye on the right person at the right time and to get the humor of it.

How can costume design be funny?

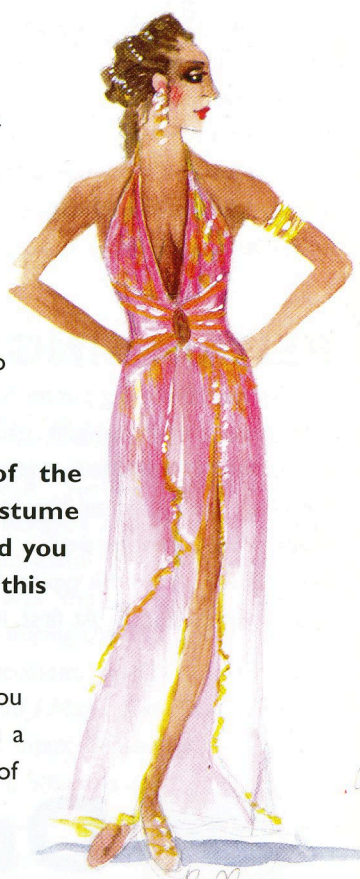
Working on this show scared me a little bit, because I kept thinking, "Well, what's funny about Greek clothing?" And then one day, I realized Greek clothing is funny. You've got guys in

skirts, with funny little boots and funny little hats. We also use exaggeration. Some of the costumes have a very large Greek key design that repeats, to help set the tone.

Please described some of the challenges of being a costume designer. What advice would you give to someone thinking of this career?

One of the first things you have to realize is that it's a collaborative effort. A lot of the decisions aren't necessarily yours, even though they're

construed as yours-- which is good and bad. I've had a lot of wonderful things happen because someone asked me, or told me, or directed me towards a certain idea. But that is not going to be about what you would think would be a good idea. You develop your ideas after you've met the other creative people, after you've met with management, and realized how you were going to work together. You also have to meet the actors themselves and realize physically and/or psychologically how you're going to work together, because that is the crux of a lot of the work. You should become a costume designer not only because you like clothing, but what people do in clothing. When you see a costume on stage, it's not an infinite moment. You have to think, "How can I help the director and choreographer tell the story with this moment and with this costume?" ■





Sing for Your Supper

THE MUSICAL DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Musical Director David Loud and Choreographer Rob Ashford took a few minutes from rehearsal to share their perspectives with *UPSTAGE*.

UPSTAGE: How did you initially develop your approach to working on this play?

Rob : David and I went through the entire score, mainly to figure out the plan for the orchestration and the sound of the music. The music has a 1940s/late 30s kind of feel, which then gives a very specific kind of feel for the physicality of the show. Once I figured that out, then I knew that I had to somehow blend musical styles of the 40s with contemporary energy, which I think is very important, especially with this adaptation of the script. So we take a modern energy and sensibility, the 40s style and then add a little bit of ancient Greece. It's a combination of those three things.

I understand some of the songs were changed. How were those decisions made?

David: There's a song called "Dear Old Syracuse," for example, which has always been a solo for Antipholus of Syracuse. We realize that we had another very talented actor who would be sitting on the stage at the same time with absolutely nothing to do, if it was a solo. Then we thought, "Well what if we turn it into a duet and gave them a little bit of harmony and counter point at the end?" And that has developed into a little dance sequence that Rob has been working out.

Rob: I think the important thing though is that we have been very respectful of the original material. We never went into this thing like "Oh let's just throw it all out! We can do anything we want with this." That was never the attitude at all.

This production is a revival that's also been re-written. How has that affected your work?

David: This production, for me, emanates so strongly from Nicky Silver's mind. He had a vision of how this show was going to be. He's not a musician and he's not a choreographer. So,

we need to sort of mind-meld with him and channel the vision he has and bring the music to life and bring the dancing to life.

His initial vision of the show, and what he created in the script, is so clear. It's about a guy searching for connections, searching for family, searching for who he is and where he came from, and all of the comic things that happen to him because of that search. Our job is to realize it musically, choreographically, casting wise, arrangement-wise.



Jonathan Dokuchitz (Antipholus of Syracuse) and Erin Dilly (Luciana) in *The Boys from Syracuse*. Photo: Joan Marcus.

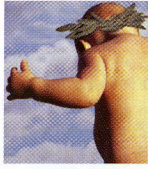
How do you tell a story through music and dance?

Rob: There's a young romantic couple in the show, for example. They are meant to be together, even though they keep saying to each other, "We can't be together" and "We shouldn't!" But when they start dancing, they're together and they end up together and they should be together. So that's one way that we used the dance, in showing those archetypes. They get to have a true Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers kind of romantic dance.

What challenges are presented by having characters who are twins?

David: We cast two actors who are physically similar. They're both very tall. They're both very handsome, with sort of square faces. Hopefully they'll look like twins. But they couldn't have more different personalities. Tom Hewitt's character (Antipholus of Ephesus) has this big, rich, masculine speaking voice that he's very skillful with, and he's sort of found a comic bravura of this blowhard. And Jonathan Dokuchitz's character (Antipholus of Syracuse) is this neurotic, terrified human being, who happens to have the most beautiful voice you could ever imagine on a man. Everything romantic becomes so heightened from him, because he's such a gifted singer.

Rob: Physically, Tom Hewitt's character would never dance because he's so full of himself. He could never dance a Fred and Ginger number, except with himself. ■



Classic Comics

A DRAMATURGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Philip Alexander

The *Boys from Syracuse* was inspired by one of Shakespeare's most famous comedies, *The Comedy of Errors*, which featured two sets of twins separated at birth. Shakespeare's play was itself an adaptation of an ancient Roman play called "The Menaechmi Twins" (which featured only one set of twins). It's in the comedies of Ancient Rome that we can find the beginnings of a comic tradition and a whole collection of classic comic characters. One example is the Braggart Soldier, a military man who liked to boast of his accomplishments, in the field of battle or the field of love, and who usually was proved to be less successful than he claimed. Another stock character of Roman comedies was the "wily slave," a schemer who appealed to the audience by playing tricks on his master. The slave's master was often a Bumbling Old Man, who might be in love with a beautiful young woman, or a Miser, whose greed would cloud his logic.

During the Italian Renaissance, similar comic character types appeared in the popular theatre form *Commedia dell'Arte*. The *Commedia* plays, which were heavily improvised, included *Il Capitano*, who, like the Roman Braggart Soldier, was a proud, boastful military man. *Pantalone* was a miserly, dim-witted old man, who would sometimes compete for the affections of a young woman with *Il Dottore*, a lustful, bumbling scholar. The role of the "wily servant" was often played by *Arlecchino* (or, *Harlequin*), who, dressed in his trademark diamond outfit, would try to woo *Columbina*, the female servant. *Pulcinella* was another more mischievous servant.

Stock comic characters continued to inspire dramatists like Shakespeare, Moliere, and other playwrights over the centuries. In America, stock comic characters took root in assorted performance forms, including vaudeville, movies, and television. Through re-runs and cable TV, we've become familiar with the comedy of early television and characters like the braggart *Ralph Kramden* from "The *Honeymooners*" or the schemers, *Lucy and Ethel* on "I Love *Lucy*", who try to outwit *Ricky and Fred*, who sometimes resemble buffoons or braggarts, depending on the

episode. The comic tradition continues into the 21st Century with shows like "The *Simpsons*," which has a buffoonish father, a well-meaning- but-shrewish wife, and a classic trickster son.

Though comedy must always be about the moment, comedic performance has a rich tradition and a history that reaches back centuries. When *Richard Rodgers*, *Lorenz Hart* and *George Abbott* created *The Boys from Syracuse*, they developed a new play that had direct ties with ancient cultures. Since these comic traditions are so adaptable and pervasive, we can expect characters similar to the braggart soldier, greedy miser, and the wily slave to keep audiences laughing well into the future. ■



Two classic *Commedia dell'Arte* characters. N.Y. Public Library Picture Collection.



Activities

DISCOVERING YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE



Left to right: Chip Zien (Dromio of Ephesus), Toni DiBuono (Luce) and Lee Wilkof (Dromio of Syracuse) in *The Boys from Syracuse*. Photo: Joan Marcus.

Before you go

Explore how classic comic types and situations are present in our modern culture. As you watch television and movies (and new plays, of course), see if you can find elements from the long tradition of comic characters and plot devices. Here are some of the things to look out for:

- A case of mistaken identity.
- A secret that is revealed, perhaps incorrectly.
- A reversal of status, in which someone powerful is replaced by someone weaker.
- An object that is misplaced or misused.
- A mean, miserly person.
- A man or a woman desperate to find a lover.
- A shrewish wife.
- A buffoon or braggart who like to impress people.
- A schemer or prankster who tricks other characters, but rarely gets away with it.

At the Theatre

Watch and Listen for examples of classic comic moments and characters in *The Boys from Syracuse*. When you find them, see if you can detect some element of truth in the performance. Here are some questions to keep in mind:

- How are these characters and situations similar to others I've seen?

- How do the performers make the characters unique and real? What do they do physically and vocally that distinguishes them from characters I've seen before?
- How do the music, dance, costume and set design help me understand the characters and their comic situations?

After the Show

Write your own comic monologue. Create two fictional twins, and give each of them different qualities from the classic comedy types. Then choose one of the twins, and write a monologue from his or her perspective. Some questions to keep in mind are:

- How do the twins feel about each other?
- What makes their relationship comical?
- What do the twins want or need from each other?
- How would the other twin respond to the ideas expressed in the monologue?

Send your work to Roundabout, and we'll share it with the people who created *The Boys from Syracuse*.

Mail it to: Education Department
Roundabout Theatre Co.
231 W. 39th St., Suite 1200
New York, NY 10018

Or email to: Phila@roundabouttheatre.org

When you get to the Theatre:

Ticket Policy

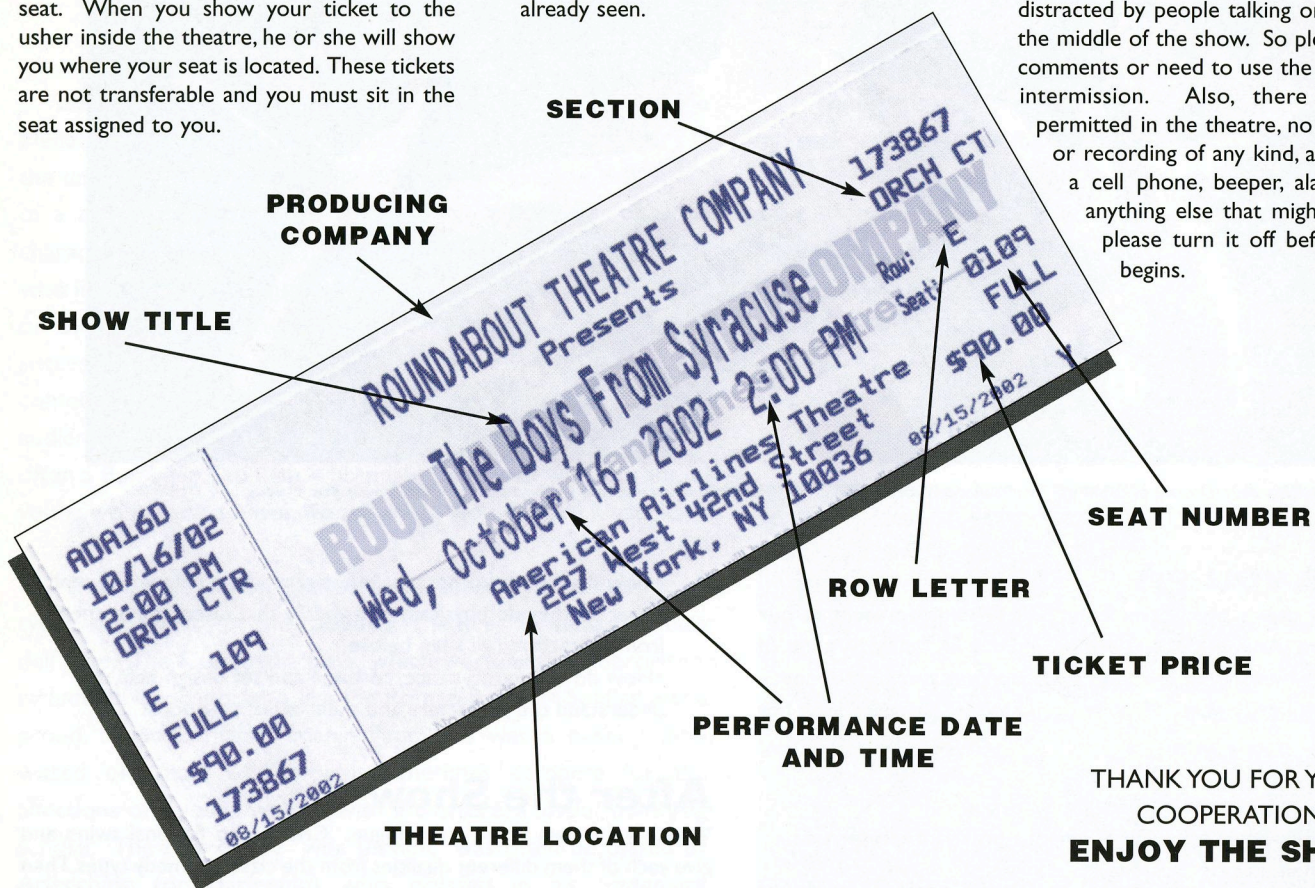
As a student participant in **Page To Stage** or **Theatre Access**, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

Programs

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

Audience Etiquette

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.
ENJOY THE SHOW!

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