

Married couple plays one too

Family connections a highlight in CRT's newest production

BY ELLEN SPITALERI

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K.B. Mercer, right, as Domina, keeps her eyes firmly on Senex, played by her real-life husband Doren Elias, during the course of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum."

K.B. Mercer and her husband Doren Elias are experiencing a rare occasion in their marriage – they play a couple married to each other in Clackamas Repertory Theatre's production of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," opening tomorrow night at **Clackamas Community College**.

Mercer plays Domina, an "overbearing wife," and Elias plays Senex, a Roman senator.

The trouble begins when Senex wants to "sneak off and have a fling while his wife is out of town" and she returns unexpectedly; because this is a "slapstick comedy," mayhem ensues.

Mercer and Elias recently moved to Portland from San Diego, where they both had active careers in theater, but said they rarely even had a one-to-one scene together. The fact that they are appearing together in "Forum" came about because of one of those theater clichés: the woman originally cast as Domina left the show, and Elias told the director that his wife was an actress.

Mercer auditioned for the role and was cast in the part, even though she said she usually does not do musicals as a soloist.

"It's a fun challenge," she added.

In addition to being married to each other, the couple owns a business together called Traveling Lantern, a children's theater company, and they said that running the business has helped them prepare for their roles.

“We’ve dealt with actors who are like buffoons, and our servants [in the play] are buffoons,” Elias said, while Mercer said she is quite capable of “cracking that whip – I’ve had to do it many times. Ordering people around is second nature.”

As far as his character goes, Elias was quick to point out that he is not “a skirt chaser,” but, he noted, “I do appreciate women.”

Show is “great fun”

As the director of the production, Ernie Casciato certainly gets to order people around, although he commended his cast by calling them “well-trained, delightful people.”

He was asked if he wanted to be in the show, but told CRT artistic director David Smith-English that he would rather direct, because he loves the show and loves and understands this kind of humor, he said.

He described the show’s style as “burlesque and vaudeville,” likening it to sketch comedy and classic comedy.

“If you study the Greeks and Romans, the comic bits still prevail. [We have] the smarter-than-everyone-else servant, the macho man, the young couple in love who are being kept apart – they are all in there,” Casciato said.

One of his favorite numbers in the show is the song “Everybody Ought to Have a Maid,” sung by Marcus Lycus, described as “a purveyor of courtesans.”

The part is played by Tobias Andersen, a well-known Portland-area actor, who was last seen on the CRT stage in the one-man show “The Illustrated Man.”

He’s never been in “Forum” before, and it has been 10 years since he has been in a musical, but Andersen said the only time he steps out of his comfort zone is when he has about “45 seconds of dance” to perform.

He described the show as “great fun” and said he gets to wear a “terrific costume that is pretty wild.”

Casciato said the plot revolves around the machinations of Pseudolus, a slave who “will do anything to get his freedom,” and the complications that follow.

The action takes place on an eye-poppingly bright set that represents three domiciles: the house of Senex and Domina, the house of Erronius and Marcus Lycus’s house.

“Like every farce, doors become an issue; entrances and exits become an issue,” Casciato said, adding that there are surprises along the way, but because this is a comedy, “you know there will be a happy ending.”