

**Something familiar, something peculiar:**

**Ohio Light Opera's *The Boys from Syracuse* (June 25)**



By Peter Feher

A traveler from ancient Greece could easily get mixed up looking at a map of modern Ohio and set out for Athens, Macedonia, or East Sparta, only to be in for a shock upon arrival. Still, it would take a misunderstanding of exceedingly farcical proportions to embark for the city of Ephesus yet somehow end up at the College of Wooster.

But this is just the sort of topsy-turvy trajectory that has landed *The Boys From Syracuse* in the Ohio Light Opera's current season. (To be clear: Our title characters hail from the Mediterranean, not Upstate New York.)

With a keen appreciation for comic absurdity, the company in residence each summer at Freedlander Theatre is mounting its first-ever staging of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart's bygone 1938 Broadway hit. OLO's production, which runs in repertory through July 30, is at once foreign and familiar — amusingly so.

We're back in the archaic days of the American musical, when the story onstage seemed little more than an excuse for songs that would later become jazz standards. The big-band syncopations of "This Can't Be Love" and the Andrews Sisters-style vocal harmonies of "Sing for Your Supper" are chief among the score's highlights, if not exactly evocative of ancient Greece.



However, the show doesn't have the pretensions of a period piece. Sure, the almost-byzantine scenario — centered on two pairs of identical twins, separated at birth and now stumbling to find each other in the environs of Ephesus — is adapted from Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. But precisely one line of the Bard's dialogue makes it into *The Boys From Syracuse*, as a joke near the end.

Overall, the musical plays fast and loose with its source material, and, in a counterintuitive way, OLO's staging stays true to that spirit.

Anachronisms abound in this madcap version of the classical world assembled by director Jacob Allen. The opening number sees the chorus eagerly awaiting an execution while dancing a routine resembling the "Macarena." A climactic scene outside a temple is accompanied by an audio sample from *The Lord of the Rings* soundtrack.

From here, it's hardly a stretch to believe that characters in tunics would croon show tunes. In their opening performance on June 25, OLO's young singers were just as committed to the comedy as they were to Rodgers and Hart's score. Both brothers named Antipholus had handsome voices, but tenors Jack Murphy and Spencer Reese really distinguished themselves in their respective roles as goofball and cynic.

That said, don't even try to tell their twin servants, Dromio and Dromio, apart. Tenor Jeremiah Angel and baritone Connor Burns each get a delightfully awkward duet with the same woman and then come together in the synchronized steps of a brother-meets-brother ballet sequence.



It follows that the female leads would be sisters — not only onstage but in real life. Soprano Camryn Finn played the proud Adriana to mezzo-soprano Leah Finn's meek Luciana, the sibling dynamic appropriately uneven — though both wind up with an Antipholus in the end.

The other women in the cast have a more complicated relationship to sharing. As the cook and handmaiden Luce, soprano Rachel Weinfeld was happy to find double Dromios to harass for domestic help (and duet delivery). Alas, the Courtesan can't count on such a reliable man, as soprano Maggie Langhorne put it not-so-demurely in her standout solo, "Oh, Diogenes!"

This bawdy, brassy number was pure fun for Langhorne, the strutting chorus, and the swinging OLO Orchestra conducted by Michael Borowitz. And where else could you encounter a song with that laugh-out-loud title? Only Ephesus by way of Wooster.

Photos courtesy of Ohio Light Opera

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