

Audience Guide



A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORVM



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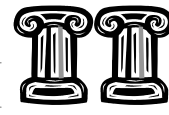
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COMPOSER'S FORVM



Born on March 22, 1930, in New York, Stephen Joshua Sondheim spent his summers in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, after his parents divorced. His neighbor was musical theatre lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, who teamed with composer Richard Rodgers in the 1950's to make create a series of ground-breaking musicals. Hammerstein became Sondheim's mentor and remained so until his death in 1960. After Sondheim graduated from Williams College in 1950, he began his musical theatre writing career by penning the musical *Saturday Night* (1954). Unfortunately, the producer suddenly died and the show was not produced for almost 45 years. Sondheim got his first big break writing lyrics for a new musical with Leonard Bernstein and Arthur Laurents: *West Side Story*. After writing just lyrics for *Gypsy* in 1959 (music by Jule Styne) Sondheim decided he wanted to only write both music and lyrics. His first full score for Broadway was the Tony Award-winning *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962).



After a huge financial flop with *Anyone Can Whistle* in 1964, Sondheim teamed with producer / director Harold Prince, creating several experimental and genre-breaking new shows known as 'concept musicals.' The first of these was *Company* (1970), which centered on a group of urban characters and was told using a non-linear plot. The next was *Follies*, an enormous musical that is considered by many as one of the greatest musicals ever written. His next musical, *A Little Night Music* (1973) utilized variations on the waltz to tell a story loosely based on Ingmar Bergman's film *Smiles of a Summer Night*. In 1976, he collaborated with John Weidman on the musical *Pacific Overtures*, which tells of the Westernization of the Japan. Sondheim followed this with one of his most popular musicals, *Sweeney Todd* (1979), which has received three productions on Broadway and was turned into a feature film by director Tim Burton starring Johnny Depp. The last of the Sondheim / Prince musicals was *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), the story of three friends told in reverse chronological order.

After his break with Prince, Sondheim found refuge at an off-Broadway theater called Playwrights Horizons. It was here he and playwright / director James Lapine first developed *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) and *Assassins* (1990), both of which were eventually produced on Broadway. With Lapine, he also created the fairy tale musical *Into the Woods* (1988) and the darkly brooding romance *Passion* (1994). Since 1994, Sondheim's only major musical is the story of the enterprising Mizner brothers first known as *Bounce*, and most recently revised as *Road Show*. Sondheim's large catalog of work has been celebrated in several stage revues including *Side By Side By Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me a Little* (1980), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting it Together* (1993), as well as many stand-alone concerts and performances.

Sondheim has contributed music to many film and television projects, including the 1966 TV musical "Evening Primrose," as well as music for the feature films *Reds*, *Stavisky*, and *Dick Tracy*. He co-wrote the screenplay for the non-musical thriller *The Last of Sheila* and the script for the Broadway mystery / thriller *Getting Away with Murder*. His celebrity has also led him to appear on the small screen as a cynical pianist in the teleplay of Ring Lardner's *June Moon* (1974) and as himself in the movie musical *Camp* (2003). He recently 'appeared' on Broadway nightly (on video) telling the story of his own career in *Sondheim on Sondheim* at Studio 54.

Sondheim has received numerous awards for his work, including an Academy Award, multiple Tony Awards (eight; more than any other composer), an honorary Olivier Award, multiple Grammy Awards, the National Medal of Arts, the Kennedy Center Honors, election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

***"Plautus was the first person to domesticize comedy. All comedy, Aristophanic for instance, was about gods and goddesses. Nobody had written about husbands and wives, daughters and maids. Plautus is responsible for the situation comedy."* —STEPHEN SONDHEIM**



AUTHOR'S FORUM



LARRY GELBART



Considered one of the greatest comic minds of all time, Larry Gelbart worked in most mediums in entertainment, including radio, television, theatre and film. He began his career writing for radio in the 1940s and after a stint in the army, he wrote for Bob Hope's television show. This was the break that would jump-start his career.

His first big TV hit was "Your Show of Shows" starring Sid Caesar, which won him two Emmy Awards. It was one of the first successful sketch comedy shows on television and expanded the possibilities of what could be written for the new medium. Gelbart is probably best known as the creator of the Korean War comedy drama "M*A*S*H." Based on a Robert Altman feature film of the same name, the show mixed comedy with drama and aired in the 1970s - a very unstable period in American history. It went on to run for eleven years and won over 50 awards, including eight Golden Globes. Larry Gelbart also had a long career writing for film. Some highlights include *Tootsie* (Oscar nomination), *Oh God!*, *Pancho Villa as Himself*, and many more.

In addition to *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, he wrote the book for the musicals *The Conquering Hero*, *One Two Three Four Five*, and *City of Angels*. Some of his non-musical plays have been produced on Broadway, including *Sly Fox* and *Mastergate*. Larry Gelbart died in 2009 at the age of 81.

***"The Roman playwright Plautus has been the greatest influence on my work. I'm in good company. He also influenced Shakespeare, Jonson, Moliere and anyone else who has written comedy for the last 2000 years."* —LARRY GELBART**

BURT SHEVELOVE



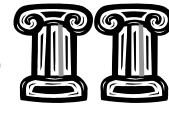
A native of Newark, NJ, Burt Shevelove graduated from both Brown and Yale universities. While at Yale, he wrote lyrics for a musical version of Plautus' *Mostellaria* and later became the resident director for the Yale Dramatic Association. His theatrical career was detoured when he elected to enter the army during World War II. When he completed his service, he began a career as a writer, director and producer for radio, television, and film, working with such stars as Judy Garland, Red Buttons, and Jack Paar. He was rewarded with both Emmy and Peabody Awards for his work.

He made his Broadway debut as the director and co-author of the revue *Small Wonder* in 1948, which ran 134 performances. He also directed the Broadway productions of *Hallelujah Baby!* (1968), a revival of *Kiss Me, Kate* (1956), *Rockefeller and the Red Indians* (1968), *Rodgers & Hart* (1975), *So Long 174th Street* (1976), *Happy New Year* (1980) and *No, No, Nanette* (1971), for which he also revised the original 1925 book. With Stephen Sondheim, he wrote and directed an adaptation of Aristophanes' *The Frogs* (1974) that was performed in and around the Yale University swimming pool. This musical was presented on Broadway by Lincoln Center Theatre in 2004 with a revised book written by Nathan Lane. Burt Shevelove died in 1982.

***"One reason for putting it (Forum) on was an affectionate one. Low comedy and farce in America are rarely done and rarely successful."* —BURT SHEVELOVE**

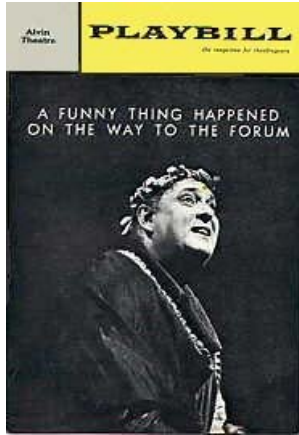


FAQ'S ABOUT "FORVM"



WHEN DID "A FUNNY THING" HAPPEN ON BROADWAY?

A Funny Thing Happen on the Way to the Forum opened at the Alvin Theatre (now the Neil Simon) on May 8, 1962. It was a big hit (playing 964 performances) and is still the longest Broadway run for a Stephen Sondheim musical. It went on to win six Tony Awards, including Best Musical.



HOW DID "A FUNNY THING" ACTUALLY HAPPEN AT ALL?

Playwright Bert Shevelove had affection for the classic Greek playwright Plautus and he thought that Larry Gelbart and Stephen Sondheim were the perfect team to adapt these stories to the musical stage. Originally titled *Roman Comedy*, the musical took its characters and plot from the Plautus plays *Miles Gloriosus*, *Pseudolus*, and *Mostellaria*.

WHO WAS "FUNNY" ENOUGH TO PLAY THE LEAD?

The writers originally wrote the lead role of Pseudolus for comedian and TV star Phil Silvers. After he turned it down, Milton Berle (another popular comic of TV's golden age) was offered the role and he declined as well. ← Zero Mostel accepted the role, which became a signature performance of his career.

DID ANY "FUNNY THINGS HAPPEN" ON THE WAY TO BROADWAY?

After an unsuccessful tryout in New Haven, Connecticut, the show moved to Washington, DC, where the critics thought the show was terrible. Their producers brought in director Jerome Robbins to 'fix' the show. The biggest change he made was encouraging the writers to re-conceive the opening. Sondheim came back with the song "Comedy Tonight," which would go on to become the most popular song in the show and completely re-frame the entire musical.

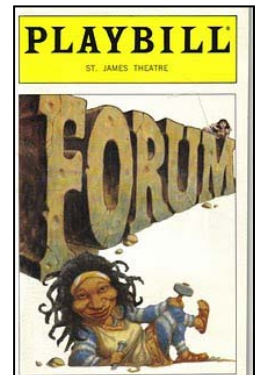
WAS THERE EVER A FILM "FORVM"?



Yes! In 1966, ← Zero Mostel and Jack Gilford reprised their performances on the screen alongside Michael Crawford (who would later become famous as the Phantom of the Opera) and screen legend Buster Keaton (← center). Although the film was a moderate success, only five of Sondheim's songs made it into the movie version.

HAS "FORVM" EVER BEEN REVIVED ON BROADWAY?

It has been revived twice! In 1974, Phil Silvers finally got the opportunity to play Pseudolus and won a Tony Award for this 156-performance revival. In 1996, Nathan Lane won a Tony for his portrayal of Pseudolus in a very successful revival that ran 715 performances. Later in the run Whoopi Goldberg → and David Alan Grier were among the comedians who took on the central role.



HAS "FORVM" EVER BEEN SEEN AT THE PAPER MILL?

The show has played Paper Mill on two occasions. The first was right after the Broadway production (1965) and starred ← Dom DeLuise and Jack Gilford. The other production came 11 years later when Paper Mill favorite Eddie Bracken starred in the show in 1976. Some other Sondheim musicals on the Paper Mill stage include *Sweeney Todd* (1992) and an acclaimed staging of *Follies* (1998).



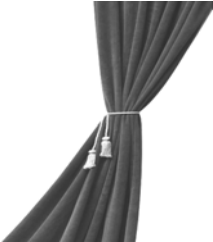
MUSICAL 'COMEDY TONIGHT'!



A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM ran on Broadway from May 1962 to August 1964, a time many agree marked the end of the 'golden age' of the Broadway musical. Look what other classic musicals were playing on Broadway during the run of FORUM!



1. **MY FAIR LADY** – 3/15/56 to 9/29/62
2. **CAMELOT** starring Julie Andrews & Richard Burton - 12/3/60 to 1/5/63
3. **HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING** – 10/12/62 to 3/6/65
4. **OLIVER!** – 1/6/63 to 11/14/64
5. **HELLO, DOLLY!** starring Carol Channing – 1/16/64 to 12/27/70
6. **FUNNY GIRL** starring Barbra Streisand – 3/26/64 to 7/1/67

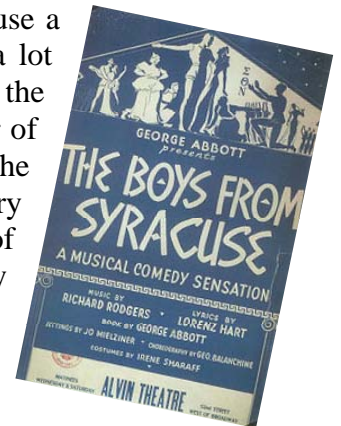


ROMAN 'COMEDY TONIGHT'!



A Funny Thing Happened on the way to the Forum is a musical adaptation of three plays by the ancient Roman comic playwright ← Plautus. Roman comedy was created in Italy during the sixth century BC, but became popular starting in 240 BC. The centerpiece of Roman theatre was the 'Ludi Romani,' a festival where artists from all over Italy came together to perform plays for the common man, as well as the aristocracy.

Roman comedy, which took most of its elements from Greek comedy, did not use a chorus (a group of actors narrating and commenting on the action) and used a lot more musical accompaniment than the Greeks. Plautus was the most popular of the Roman playwrights due to his farcical style and his use of romance at the center of most of his stories. He and Roman playwright Terence are often credited with the creation of the 'stock character,' putting identifiable characters in extraordinary situations. Stock characters are still used today on the stage and screen. One of Plautus' most popular plays, *The Manaechmi*, a play about mistaken identity involving a set of twins, was adapted into *The Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare. Both of these stories were source material for the 1938 musical comedy *The Boys from Syracuse* by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart →.





FVNNY CHARACTER FORVM



Throughout the musical, the authors use the character names for added comedy! Here's a look at what the characters' names really mean! After viewing the show, see if you think the names fit the characters!



- **PSEUDOLUS:** from the Greek word *pseudo* meaning false.
- **HYSTERIUM:** from the Greek word *hustera*, a nervous disease of the womb.
- **DOMINA:** from the Latin word *dominus*, a lady or mistress.
- **SENEX:** from the Latin *senectus*, meaning old.
- **HERO:** meaning principal or main character.
- **PHILIA:** from the Greek word *philos*, abnormal attraction to; loving.
- **ERRONIUS:** from the Latin word *erroneous*, meaning wandering or straying.
- **MILES GLORIOSUS:** from the Latin word *milia*, a glorious soldier.
- **MARCUS LYCUS:** from the Latin word *licentia*, meaning lacking moral discipline.
- **GEMINAE:** named for the constellation twins in the northern hemisphere.
- **GYMNASIA:** from the Greek word *gumnasion*, meaning to exercise naked!
- **PANACEA:** from the Greek word *panakeia*, all healing; remedy for all diseases.
- **TINTINABULA:** from the Latin word *tinnire*, to ring.
- **VIBRATA:** from the Latin word *vibraire*, to tremble or vibrate.
- **PROTEANS:** taking on different forms. From the Greek sea god Proteus.



VAUDEVILLE TONIGHT!



“This is a scenario for vaudevillians. There are many details omitted from the script. They are part of any comedian’s bag of tricks: the double take, the mad walk, the sighs, the smirks, the stammerings. All these and more are intended to be supplied by the actor.” — Authors’ Note, Forum script

Vaudeville comedy acts included jokes and song parodies, monologues, bits (two or three person routines), and sketches (short comic scenes with a story). To these comedians added physical comedy: the poke in the eye and the knockabout or slapstick ‘business.’ Some entertainers took their stage persona from stock vaudeville characters. For example, Eddie Cantor took on the guise of the clown with nervous energy while Jack Benny borrowed the cheapskate with a dash of sensibility. Vaudeville performers were often from the same working class and immigrant backgrounds as their audiences. Yet the laughter they provided their patrons was sometimes at the expense of other working class American groups. Humor based on ethnic characterizations was a major component of many routines. For example, ‘blackface’ imitations carried over from minstrels. ‘Dialect acts’ featured caricatures of many ethnic groups including Irish, Italians, Germans and Jews. By the end of vaudeville’s heyday (the early 1930s), most ethnic acts had been eliminated from the bill. Some of *Forum*’s humor also came from the Borscht Belt. This informal term was applied to hotels and summer resorts frequented by Jewish New Yorkers, particularly in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Borscht is a kind of beet soup popular with people of Eastern European origin. Many comedians got their start in the Borscht Belt: Woody Allen, Milton Berle, Mel Brooks, Red Buttons, Phyllis Diller, Danny Kaye, Jerry Lewis, and Joan Rivers, among others.



Vaudeville never really died, it re-appeared in the TV sitcoms of the 1950s: “I Love Lucy”, Bewitched”, “Green Acres” and “The Honeymooners”, to name a few. As Larry Gelbart wrote for a Bob Hope monologue, “When vaudeville died, television is the box they put it in.”