

REVIEW

'Comedy of Errors' underrates original work

Allan Swafford
Special to the Advertiser

"The Comedy of Errors," which opened Friday at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, is historically among the most abused — both by academic critics and theatrical directors — of Shakespeare's plays. This unfortunate tradition continues in the ASF production which sets the comedy in contemporary Miami and, worse, trivializes the all important envelope plot of Egeon's condemnation and pending execution, the plot which is the setting for the jewel-like farce of the central action.

In "Errors" Emilia, wife of Egeon of Syracuse bears twin sons, both named Antipholus. The parents buy twin slaves, both named Dromio, for their sons. Shortly the family is separated in a storm at sea, and each parent ends up with one son and one slave, but Emilia loses her two to "rude fishermen of Corinth."

The play we see occurs years later when Egeon allows his two to go in search

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WANT TO GO?

- **What:** William Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors"
- **When:** next showings are 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Sunday. It continues in repertory through July 23
- **Where:** On the Festival Stage of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Blount Cultural Park
- **Admission:** Tickets range from \$20-\$30, depending on date
- **Information:** 271-5353

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'Comedy': Modern setting undercuts play's depth, brilliance

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of their brothers, then still later Egeon goes in search of them. Egeon and his two, unaware of each other, arrive in Ephesus, a city forbidden to Syracusans, where the other Antipholus is a prominent and married citizen still served by his Dromio. As the various look-alikes begin to be confused with each other the play becomes frenetic farce.

The ASF production, set in contemporary Miami, quickly proves the validity of John Gielgud's wise dictum that to set Shakespeare much after his own time is dangerous. Elizabethan English issuing from the mouths of jiving, rapping characters, immigrated snowbirds or characters modeled on Mafiosi, reaches a point of absurdity.

But the true problem lies deeper in the play's production concept, which underestimates the depth

and brilliance of the play itself, continuing the historical contempt for the play.

There are clever portrayals here, but they seem as if they would fit better into a written-for-television production — say, "Saturday Night Live."

Charles Caldwell's set — a neon-lit, Art Deco dream of Miami — is a brilliant, evocative piece of work that references Shakespeare's conscious use of the classic stage of Roman farce as well as the playwright's own Elizabethan stage, it is a shame the production could not match it.

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