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THEATER REVIEW

ASF makes a modern
'Comedy' with salsa beatBy MARY COLURSO
News staff writer

Director Risa Brainin has cooked up a hot-tamale version of William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Who would've thought that an Elizabethan tale of mistaken identity would update so nicely to contemporary Florida and the Cuban section of Miami?

Brainin deserves applause for her wacky, innovative vision in transforming the 16th-century text, and for guiding a team of actors who seem unafraid to take the conceit as far as it'll go.

Comedy, regarded as the Bard's first play, must move fast and furiously or some of it sinks like a heavily laden freighter. The play also requires a strong ensemble cast with a highly developed sense of slapstick.

In Brainin's capable hands, audiences can easily suspend their sense of disbelief at the prospect of two brothers, both named Antipholus, running amok in the melting-pot atmosphere of a busy seaport. Each of the men has no clue his long-lost twin is in town, and each is accompanied by a twin servant called Dromio.

Merry mixups ensue among friends, family and business associates — for example, Antipholus One is dragged home for dinner by the jealous wife of Antipholus Two; Dromio One

★★★

THE COMEDY
OF ERRORS

By William Shakespeare.
Directed by Risa Brainin.
Presented by the Alabama
Shakespeare Festival,
Montgomery.

Festival Stage.
Performances through July 23.
Call 1-800-841-4273
for tickets.

endures beatings because he didn't carry out orders received by Dromio Two; and so on.

Audiences can sit back and bless this mess until July 23, when *Comedy of Errors* ends its run in Montgomery. Meantime, ticketholders can revel in the Art Deco set designed by Charles Caldwell, which transforms into a lively dance floor for cha-cha-cha-ing extras during the scene changes.

Brainin's production sounds just as good as it looks, especially when Chris Mixon cuts loose with extravagant hip-hop riffs as one of the Dromios. There are a couple of weak links among the performers, but Eric Ware provides us with a mighty jazzy Antipholus, employing the cadences of a Hallelujah preacher or Harlem Renaissance hepcat when the spirit moves him.

If you go, take special note of Anne James, whose portrayal of a nouveau-riche, New York-style housewife would fit right into the *Sopranos*.