

THE TWO RIVER TIMES™

Two River Theater Will Bring A Classic Comedy to Red Bank



Jessica Stone will direct the comedy "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" at the Two River Theater this fall. The news that the theater secured the hard-to-produce classic comedy was announced at the theater's opening night show of "Your Blues Ain't Sweet Like Mine." Photo courtesy Two River Theater

RED BANK – Patrons who attended the Two River Theater's April 11 opening night show of "Your Blues Ain't Sweet Like Mine" were treated to the first announcement about next season's offerings – The Stephen Sondheim musical "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" will be staged from Nov. 14 to Dec. 13.

The show is inspired by the farces of the ancient Roman playwright Plautus. "Many people think of Plautus as the first real comic playwright," said John Dias, the theater's artistic director. "The show is satirical of Roman life with old classic Catskills shtick humor. It's as if Plautus went on vacation in the Catskills and brought along Sondheim to write the score." "Forum" first opened on Broadway in 1962 starring Zero Mostel and won five Tony Awards, including Best Musical. It was staged again in 1972 with Phil Silvers, and again in 1996 led by Nathan Lane.

"We're really excited about it," Dias said. "With 'Camelot' we found that the Two River Theater can contribute a lot to great American theater classics by bringing them into the 21st century. We will be true to its origins of raucous comedy but find a way to make it relevant today."

“Forum” will be directed by Jessica Stone, who helmed “Absurd Person Singular” earlier this season. “Jessica has an amazing sense of humor and a real skill with sophisticated comedy, particularly farce,” Dias said.

The show will include a cast of 12, including “some of the best musical theater artists working on Broadway today,” Dias said. Musical Director Gary Adler will lead the orchestra of eight to nine members.

“It’s a lot more people than we can usually manage to get into the theater,” Dias said. “This is one of the biggest shows we’ve tackled, but it’s going to be an extraordinary piece of theater.” Dias, who has been with Two River Theater for four years, is trying to attract new and diverse audiences by staging a wide variety of offerings. He said a rendition of “The Music Man” with an African-American cast was a big success for the theater. He hopes “Your Blues Ain’t Sweet Like Mine” will have the same impact. Other performances have been aimed at Latino audiences, younger theatergoers and families.

“We are staying true to the mission of the theater, to bring the highest quality works in American theater to Red Bank audiences,” Dias said. “We are always broadening our offerings. The Two River Theater is a great place. I’m stunned by the people in our area who say they’ve never been here. It’s one of the greatest cultural jewels right in our backyard.”

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