

Actors take production roles for HTI melodrama

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Between them, Pat Weston and Tom Lively have logged more than half a century in community theatre, most of that time on stage.

Now, they're finally getting their feet wet as producer and director of a local show.

It's *The Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, a turn-of-the-century musical melodrama which Hamilton Theatre Inc. is performing as a cabaret entertainment most weekends in December and into January at its studio on MacNab Street North.

This is one of those hiss-the-villain, cheer-the-hero escapades about shenanigans in the Old West with a dozen characters sporting such subtle monickers as Rusty Witts, Mannly Rasch, Lily White, Parson Kindly and a song-and-dancehall lady named Cinnamon Hickey. The mind boggles.

"I haven't worked this hard since I was executor of my mother's will," says Weston, familiar to HTI audiences over the years in roles as diverse as Charity Hope Valentine and Dolly Levi.

"As producer, your fingers are in every pie. And I'm learning all the time. It came as a great surprise to discover I had to book the caterer and get the balloons for New Year's Eve."

Weston says she was "sweet-talked" into accepting the producer's job last spring. "But I have always thought that, after 35 years of performing, you owe it as something you ought to do."

Finding a director was no problem.

Lively, a busy actor and designer in local productions, had been thinking about directing for many years.

He's been an area drama fixture since his 1972 debut as Snoopy, singing about Suppertime, in a 1972 Burlington Little Theatre production of *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*.

Finding a cast was more of a challenge.

For one thing, HTI had just finished a mainstage show, *The Boys From Syracuse*, and lots of people wanted a rest. Then, too, a cast of 12 is fairly large for cabaret. There was competition -- particularly for male roles -- from two other area musicals: the upcoming *Evita* by the Hamilton Players' Guild and *The Music Man* by the Burlington Light Opera Society.

Finally, there's a fair amount of sacrifice for anyone involved in the HTI Christmas cabaret show. It means rehearsing throughout November, then working every Friday and Saturday night during December, including New Year's Eve, for free.

"For our first audition, we had 15 people come out for the 12 roles," Lively says. "Then we made phone calls. Then we had dropout problems. But with each change, the cast got stronger."

The current cast includes some familiar veterans of the local theatre scene along with some newcomers to major roles. The standbys include Chuck Hayes, playing the saloonkeeper, named Red White. Marilyn Alex, doubling as choral director, Marlene Smith and Lynn Hutchinson will play the saloon's song-and-dance ladies, "none of whom," according to the script, "will ever see 40 again."

Lyla Miklos will play the heroine, Lily White, with Brian Gedke as the stalwart, but stupid, hero, Rusty Witts. Walter Mykytyshyn will portray the villainous Mannly Rasch, with Brian Hill, Alison Baptist, Mark McCutcheon, K.T. Matson and Bill Croft in supporting roles.

"The Saloonkeeper's Daughter is not your standard melodrama," Lively maintains. "The lyrics are integral to the plot. And the script is very detailed, even to the point of giving notes on which way the fingers should point when you speak an aside to the audience."

SIGNPOST

The Saloonkeeper's Daughter, a musical melodrama by Hamilton Theatre Inc., will be presented Dec. 10-11, 17-18, 30 and Jan. 7-8 at 8 p.m. for \$12 at the HTI Studio, 140 MacNab St. N., Hamilton.

A special New Year's Eve performance on Dec. 31 includes dinner, show and party for \$53.50.

The HTI ticket number is 522-3032