

## **Saloon Cartoon: HTI's Corny Melodrama is Predictable Fun**

**By Stewart Brown**

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The corn is higher than the CN Silo in "The Saloonkeeper's Daughter", a moustache-twirling musical melodrama which is this year's Christmas cabaret show by Hamilton Theatre Inc.

This is a horse opera designed to prove that love conquers liquor.

Or, as saloonkeeper, Red White tells his dance-hall girls: "Get frisky! No frisky – no whiskey!"

It's the Code of the West. Ptui!

The plot – you would ask – involves villainous Mannly Rasch and various nefarious schemes. One is to foreclose on the saloon mortgage so he can make big real-estate bucks when the railroad comes to town.

Another is to let Red White keep the saloon, if he will hand over his daughter, Lily, in marriage. Or maybe Mannly will just wed Parson Kindly's daughter, Charity, who's itching to bust loose, though not with this Rasch.

The whole thing plays like a World Wrestling Federation morality tale, right down to the sepulchral countenance of Walter Mykytyshyn's bad guy.

So be prepared to hiss, boo, cheer and sigh. Pianist John Sloan provides the cues, over on the ivories.

Director Tom Levely has a cast of 12, which is a lot of bodies on his compact saloon set in the HTI Studio. Accordingly, choreography tends to be elementary.

There's a range of experience on parade. Some such as Chuck Hayes' saloonkeeper and the entertaining trio of Marilyn Alex, Lynn Hutchinson and Marlene Smith as his arthritic floozies have been around the corral a few times.

Others are pretty new to this performing business. All are game about it.

Generally, the women have the better singing voices – with Lyla Miklos' light operatic trilling setting a nice tone for ingénue Lily.

Allison Baptist shows comic promise as the Parson's daughter. Alex, Hutchinson and Smith have a grand time as those saloon sirens, Sally Forth, Cinnamon Hickey and Molly Bolt.

Brian Hill, eyes cast heaven-wards, is a suitably humble preacher. Brian Gedcke wears the white hat of the bumbling hero, Rusty Witts.

Kati Mason is Mykytyshyn's sidekick, mugging like Crazy Guggenheim on the old Jackie Gleason Show. Mark McCutcheon is the saloonkeeper's son.

Ideally, it would be nice to have a firmer, more consistently meaty handle on the exaggerated melodramatics from all characters.