

## **Show of Faith! - Benefit Raises Cash for Theatre Group**

**By Stewart Brown**

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All the affection wasn't just in the songlist as Hamilton Theatre Inc. ushered in Valentine's weekend with a benefit concert Friday night.

"Been There, Sung That!" found HTI's troops rallying in song at the former gospel hall on MacNab Street North, which the musical theatre company calls home.

HTI took a \$14,000 bath on "She Loves Me", their mainstage musical this past fall. A sold-out crowd of 100 contributed \$2,300 on Friday, which will be used towards early expenses of the company's next musical. "The Secret Garden", opening this April.

More significant, the concert was a show of faith in the amateur company that's performed 110 musicals since 1956. It was support by those who bought tickets and by both veteran and more recent HTI performers.

It's important that younger members keep that HTI flame burning, not just onstage and backstage, but in its directors' boardroom too.

Nobody really wants to see HTI become a footnote to this city's show-business history. HTI has provided Hamilton with far too many good times to fade away.

Yes, the entertainment competition is much tougher today than it was 43 years ago when the group started. That means HTI has to work all the harder to publicize and sell its shows.

Meantime, the company enjoys a healthy talent pool, as "Been There, Sung That!" showed.

Some of the evening's highlights included Lyla Miklos' "Can't Help Lovin' That Man of Mine", the dramatic "Secret Garden" duet on "Lily's Eyes" by Tim Denis and Marco Lutterotti, "A Chorus Line's" poignant "At The Ballet" by Christine and Barbara Forsyth and Tina Traini, and Agnes Kata's cynical "Life Story" from "Closer Than Ever".

But the evening was one extended celebration in song, from hosts John McHenry and Barbara Lynn Redpath, John Bond, Stewart Mason, Chris Miller, Lorne Gretsinger, Babe Schurter-Santi, Meredith McLean, Jane Hailes, Pat Weston, John Porritt, Krista Lyel, Walter Mykytyshyn, Sarena Paton (a lovely new voice in "The Secret Garden"), producer Michael Smith (serenaded by the cast on his 25th birthday), Jeanette Wilkinson, Leslie Kay and the always entertaining Ivan Brozic.

Hardest-working person the whole night though, was musical director Anne Barnshaw, at the piano.

Fittingly, the finale featured Marilyn Alex, whose own 43 years of performing and cheerleading for this company make her as much as anyone the spirit of HTI.

Early on, Alex offered "Hello, Young Lovers", then returned to close the show with some of her "Nonsense" nonsense, as that added Mother Superior; Mary Regina, before trilling "Climb Every Mountain".

That's something Hamilton Theatre Inc. has done with admirable regularity over five decades.

No reason to stop now, but if you'd like to show some encouragement, the ticket number for "The Secret Garden" is 522-3032.