

[theatre]

International celeb plays Festival's *Gypsy*

by Robert Barossi

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, New Bedford Festival Theatre presents *Gypsy*, one of the most-loved American musicals off all time. For the title role, they have cast an internationally renowned singer and actress who has won critical acclaim and audience praise throughout her career — Sue Mathys.

Based on the memoirs of entertainer Gypsy Rose Lee, *Gypsy* tells the story of the quintessential stage mother, Mama Rose, as she pursues show business dreams for herself and her two daughters. Playing Mama Rose is Sue Mathys, who has performed around the world and in some of the most iconic roles in musical theatre.

Though she has played such roles as Sally Bowles, Mrs. Lovett, Edith Piaf, Maria Callas and Norma Desmond, Mathys has

never before gotten to portray Mama Rose on stage.

"I performed some of her songs in a concert with the Lucerne Symphony...it was electrifying to hear that glorious score played by the 60-piece orchestra," she says.

This role gave Mathys the opportunity to dive into the period and life of Gypsy Rose Lee, whom she describes as "a fascinating lady."

"On the songs, I have worked for years... I adore playing period pieces," she says. "Half of the fun is doing the research. After doing the research, of course you have to add your own imagination and energy to make the part your own."

"Sally, Norma and Mrs. Lovett are invented characters. I researched the circumstances and periods, watching dozens of silent movies, reading about the era. For Berlin, during the '30s, I was able to draw from my own experience of living in Berlin," she says.

GYPSY

New Bedford Festival Theatre
684 Purchase Street, New Bedford, MA
Runs July 16-17, 18, 22-25
www.nbfestivaltheatre.com

"Callas and Piaf are historic icons and I studied their life work meticulously — listening to as many recordings as possible, watching video footage and reading everything written about them."

Preparation for each role is its own unique journey, Mathys says, "Rose was a real life person, but the real life Rose seems to have been more disturbed and egomaniac than the character the authors of the musical developed. In the play, Rose grows as a human being and becomes capable of genuine generosity."

Whether considered the play's



hero or villain, good or evil, Mathys believes it is her job to bring out the Rose's human traits.

"I need to be compassionate, so the audience will remain interested in her wacky personality. I would love for the audience to be torn between being outraged about her ruthlessness on the one hand and being fascinated by her vitality and indestructibility on the other."

Mathys enthusiastically describes the most fun aspect of playing this role.

"The magnificent songs and lyrics I get to sing, the brilliant lines I get to say, and that she is

so very non-adult, obliviously acting and reacting from her gut impulses... a delight to play for any actor. And I know I'll be working with a great partner and a superb director, what else could one hope for?"

Along with all the great songs, lyrics and lines, Mathys believes that Rose also offers something for audiences to learn from her story. "All of our lifetime we all are driven to fulfill our dreams and to heal our traumas. Find a creative and responsible way to do so, without abusing, betraying or abandoning the people you love."

Good to have *Dolly* back where she belongs, Theatre by the Sea

by Jim Seavor

Director Joshua Logan said that in every show there is a moment when you know if it will be a hit...or not.

Why mention this?

I thought of it at Theatre by the Sea's strong and lively production of *Hello Dolly*. At heart, this is a gentle, funny musical about a widow in 1890 who supports herself by, well, meddling. She calls it putting her hand in. Everything from matchmaking to dancing Dolly is up to the task.

The problem is, that while she used to enjoy being independent, her life now seems to be as dry as a leaf pressed between the pages

HELLO DOLLY

Theatre by the Sea, 3
64 Cards Pond Road, Matunuck
Runs thru July 11
www.theatrebythesea.com

of a book. She wants to get back in the world before it's too late, *Before the Parade Passes By*.

She has her eyes set on Horace Vandergelder, the Yonkers half a millionaire, or at least his cash register — Carol Channing hugged it. Huffman gives it a pat.

The moment that turns Dolly into a legendary hit? It comes in the second act when Dolly appears at the head of the stairs at Harmonia Gardens and everyone

on stage, and probably a few in the audience, breaks into the title song. At that time *Hello Dolly* comes up with enough energy to practically put the show and theater into orbit.

If NASA had been able to harness it, think of the money it would have saved.

Traditionally, Dolly has been played much larger than life by folk as Channing, Pearl Bailey, Ethel Merman — none of them shrinking violets.

At Theatre by the Sea, Tony Award-winner Cady Huffman (Ulla in *The Producers*) is a quieter and gentler Dolly. She's not larger than life, she's life well-played. Instead of bombast, she brings warmth, charm and a sense of fun. Here is someone who

seems to really want her late husband to send her a sign he approves of her plans. And here is someone whose joy increases the more she returns to the life she once led.

A lot of the bombast in this *Hello Dolly* is left to the man who owns the register, Horace Vandergelder. Al Bundonis gives Horace a touch of warmth — not enough to melt anything — just a touch beneath the yelling. He's someone who eventually learns you do not say no to Dolly no matter how many times you say it to others.

When Horace heads to New York City to claim his expected bride-to-be Irene Molloy, his overworked and greatly underpaid employees Hackl and Tucker,

(Jason Ostrowski and Jake Bridges), decide to also go to the big city and not come back until they've had a big adventure and kissed a girl. Hackl is 33 and thinks it's about time. Tucker is only 17 and more interested in seeing a stuffed whale.

Their adventure really becomes big when they meet Irene, nicely played and sung by Rebecca Barco, and her assistant Minnie Fay, a great comic turn by Kelly Kantner.

Lou Bird's elaborate costumes give *Hello Dolly* a marvelously colorful look, and Kevin P. Hill's direction and choreography keeps things moving. Dolly's fun to meet and seeing her again is like getting reacquainted with an old friend.