

Wartime hilarity staged at Cornerstone

By Dave Whitfield - Rocky Mountain Outlook

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It's the 1940s in the South Pacific theatre of war and pin-up girl Peggy Jones is on hand to entertain the troops in a USO show.

At an afternoon rehearsal, Peggy discovers her backup singers, Max, Lawrence and Patrick Andrews, are both enthusiastic and adoring. What she doesn't know, though, is that the Andrews brothers are actually stagehand army washouts who have replaced backup singer no-shows.

Things seem to be going smoothly when (insert collective gasp here) it's discovered the famous Andrews Sisters are unable to make it to the USO show as headliners. The famous Andrews Sisters have been quarantined in Hawaii and the show will be cancelled.

Cancelled, unless, of course, the Andrews brothers can step in and prove they have "the show must go on" dedication and chutzpah.

What follows through Cornerstone Theatre and Restaurant's March 24 to April 3 musical staging of The Andrews Brothers is a series of madcap adventures, mistaken identities, guys in drag and a love story.

Indeed, the performance sees the Andrews brothers give the performance of their lives – as the Andrews Sisters.

LaVerne, Maxene and Patricia Andrews were the first female vocal group to earn a gold record, had numerous best-selling singles (ie: "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy") and records and became a household name by the 1940s. During World War II, they entertained Allied forces and encouraged U.S. citizens to purchase war bonds.

At Cornerstone, Anna Hurshman (Peggy), is joined by Michael Brockman (Patrick, Patty), Kholby Wardell (Lawrence, LaVerne) and Parris Greaves (Max, Maxene).

"It's a sassy, sexy, hilarious show," said Hurshman, a Halifax native who performed at Cornerstone for the summer show, "and tons of great music that everyone will know if they know the Andrews Sisters.

"It's hard not to enjoy it; there are stuffed bras, bushy eyebrows, hair sticking out of panty hose and gorgeous makeup. It's also the hardest show I've ever done."

The cast, said Torontonion Greaves, has been working six days a week in rehearsal, on both the music and choreography.

"It's pretty hysterical and the costumes are hilarious," said Brockman. "We're staying out of the norm, broadening our horizons and putting on a great show for a small community that appreciates theatre."

Brockman kidded that The Andrews Brothers is the only time "other than in college when having drinks with friends" that he's been in drag. "It's certainly the first time in front of a lot of people."

Vancouverite Wardell, on the other hand, said he'd never been in drag until his last two shows. "The last one was more an impersonation of a female, while this one is just trying to get through the show."

The Andrews Brothers is directed by JP Thibodeau, with choreography by Amber Bissonnette, stage management by Gina Power and with sound programming by Etienne St. Jacques.

"This show is definitely funny, definitely a comedy, although there are touching moments here and there," said Greaves.

Musically, The Andrews Brothers has been a challenge, said Wardell. "There are three- and four-part harmonies that are very difficult. There's no one to rely on for help, you just have to know it and know it well.

"It's really, really difficult music. They (the real Andrews Sisters) had a sound they wanted, with lots of lines and odd jumps you wouldn't see in most music. When done well, it sounds easy, but you could tell they knew each others' voice really well."

Vocally, Brockman said, "it's the complete range, from low F up to a B and falsetto. I'm pulling out a lot of tricks. You have to do a lot of warmups and really take care of your voice. Coming here from Toronto, it takes a week for your voice to adjust."

For the most part, all the performers have already noticed the much, much dryer air here in the Rockies; plenty of water is being consumed during rehearsals.

The Andrews Brothers run Wednesday through Saturday, March 24-27 and March 31 to April 3.

Tickets are available by calling Cornerstone at 609-0004 or visiting www.atthecorner.ca