

A Holiday Mid-Life Crisis

New Holiday Musical *Mrs. Claus in Menopause*

By Lorin Cipolla
Special to Living

Things are heating up this holiday season at the North Pole. A new one-woman musical, entitled *Mrs. Claus in Menopause*, will be staged in Old Saybrook on Dec. 20. The show, co-written by Kathleen Dahill and Guilford resident Patricia Souney, takes an unusual look into the personal life of Mrs. Claus—a glimpse not often revealed to the public.

The eternally merry Mrs. "Doris" Claus, played by Susan Gayle Pynn, is experiencing stress in her life—her husband, Santa, is getting on her nerves, her mother-in-law and two kids are grating on her patience, and on top of all that there is an impending elf strike at the North Pole. Amidst the hectic happenings of her day, Doris Claus is going through menopause, which has turned out to be a life-changing experience.

Souney and Dahill have collaborated together on other productions in the past. They wrote a teen musical entitled *Siblings*, which won the Best Production Award at the 1995 Associated Community Theatres of Connecticut Festival. Both continue to be heavily involved in performing arts.

"Kathy came to me with the idea five or six years ago. I was menopausal at the time, and since laughter is my best medicine, I jumped at the opportunity to work on the project," says Souney, when asked about the comical story idea. "We met a few times getting out more ideas than we could ever use. The real work was pulling all these crazy, silly, sad and funny ideas,



Susan Gayle Pynn stars in the one-woman holiday musical *Mrs. Claus in Menopause*.

episodes, and stories into the structure of the play."

According to Souney, it took a year to get the project on its feet.

The initial performance of the one-woman show took place in November and was so well received, the trio decided to stage it again. At first the collaborators expected an intimate crowd of about 70 to 100 people, but soon the audience grew to about 180 people and was deemed "standing room only." Many women attended the show, but men came to see the performance as well.

"Kathy and I worked very hard at keeping the spin positive—we don't "Santa bash"—change is

something that both women and men experience. *Metamorphoses* is a universal theme," explains Souney.

After the first two performances, the writers worked out some glitches in the program and hope that it will run even more smoothly the third time around in Old Saybrook.

"The show was very warmly received. We found a couple of places that still need work but it is gratifying that we were able to forecast audience response as accurately as we did," says Souney.

In the future, Souney and Dahill hope to find groups that would like to produce the show as a fundraiser. Though the play is about a holi-

day character, it has some underlying themes that are universal and transcend Christmas.

Kathleen Dahill, a composer-lyricist, vocalist and educator hails from Westerly, R.I. She has served as musical director for the Ivoryton Playhouse, Emerson College Youtheatre, and various regional theater companies throughout New England. She received the East Connecticut Production Award and participated in both the ASCAP and BMI musical theater workshops in New York where she studied with the Tony-award winning composer-lyricist Maury Yeston. Dahill co-wrote the book with Souney and also wrote the music and lyrics for *Mrs. Claus in Menopause*.

Director Patricia Souney has staged more than 90 productions for theaters throughout the Northeast. In addition, she has won the Associated Community Theatres of Connecticut's Best Director Award twice. She currently directs the Guilford Youth and Family Services' Improv Troupe and the Lyme's Youth Services' Acting Up. In addition to writing the book with Dahill, Souney directed the comedic musical.

The star of the one-woman show, Susan Gayle Penn, has performed all over the state from Fairfield to Norwich. Recently, she appeared at Ivoryton Playhouse in the River-Rep's *Follies* and reprised her role as the evil Mrs. Lovett in the Spirit of Broadway's *Sweeny Todd*, where she was nominated for Best Actress. She was also featured at Amarante's Dinner Theatre for 11 seasons.

The next performance of *Mrs. Claus in Menopause* will take place at the Estuary Council, 220 Main St. Old Saybrook at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$10. Call Judith Drake at 860-388-0439 for tickets and more information.