



Peter Casolino/Register

Clinton actress Susan Gayle Pynn stars in the one-woman show, "Mrs. Claus in Menopause," at St. Therese's Church in Branford.

Don't tell Santa

But 'Mrs. Claus in Menopause' shows his wife is really the funny one in the family



At rehearsal with Pynn is Kathleen Dahill (right), who wrote "Mrs. Claus" with Pat Souney of Guilford.

By Sandi Kahn Shelton
Register Staff

If you've never given any thought to what it would be like to be Mrs. Claus, you're not alone.

"For most people, she's just the ultimate unseen woman behind a very powerful man," says Kathleen Dahill, who has recently taken great strides to rectify the situation. "No one really thinks about what *she* might need."

But Dahill, who writes musicals, believes that Mrs. Claus is not a cartoon character at all, but instead is the perfect symbol for something all of us struggle with: how to be ourselves in a world which threatens to eat us up with its demands.

Now Dahill, a New Haven native who now lives in West-erly, R.I., and her friend, fellow writer and director Pat Souney of Guilford, have written a play that gives us a portrait of Mrs. Claus' life.

It's called "Mrs. Claus in Menopause," and although it's a comedy and has plenty of songs that poke fun at our fast-paced lives, Dahill says, "It's also a poignant look at the changes we go through in life whether they're funny or sad or confusing."

There's a lot you didn't know about Mrs. Claus, believe us.

For one thing, her first name is not "Mrs." It's Doris — and yes, even though she's 500 years old, she's just hitting menopause. Despite this, she's not simply some white-haired, cookie-cutter type person. Dahill points out, "She's got a lot of life to her," she says.

She just maybe needs a little help.

After all, as the one-woman show illustrates by letting us eavesdrop on her telephone

IF YOU GO

Event: "Mrs. Claus in Menopause"
When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday and
2 p.m. Sunday

Where: St. Therese's Church,
105 Leesles Island Road, Branford

Tickets: \$10
Info: (203) 458-6193

conversations, she's dealing with a teenage daughter, a son who's trying to find himself, a couple of in-law things, some hormone surges here and there — and oh, yes, an elf strike. And while it's great being married to a great man like Santa, it still does take some work, Dahill points out, especially on Dec. 24, when the play is set.

"This show has been six years in the making," says Souney, who has staged more than 90 productions for theaters throughout the Northeast and is the director of the Guilford Youth and Family Services' Improv Troupe.

"Kathy and I wrote the book together, and then she wrote six new original songs for it. Last summer, we got Susan Gayle Pynn, a Clinton actress who's perfect for the role. And we've now found a place to put on the show, and see how audiences react."

Dahill says the show is an upbeat look at the way we all deal with stress and tension. "Doris Claus is not an angry woman, but she's also not sickly sweet," says Dahill. "When we first started thinking about this topic years ago, we asked all our friends' mothers what midlife had been like for them.

"We gathered lots of anecdotes about menopause. But then we put the whole project

Doris: Mrs. Claus' real name is revealed in one-woman show

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aside, I moved to California for a while, and then moved back. Last year, we thought, why not get out that show and write the rest of it?"

Lots had changed since they first had the idea. For one thing, Dahill says, shows about women's physical issues were blossoming all over the place. "It was more OK than ever to talk about these things," she says. "The Vagina Monologues' had opened the floodgates. And now there was a musical in New York about menopause. It was time to 'out' Doris Claus."

But don't expect Doris Claus to sit around feeling sorry for herself or saying mean things about Santa. You won't find that here.

"The show deals with the everyday issues people deal with," Dahill says. "It's definitely not man-bashing. It's about learning how to live in the world when everybody wants a piece of you. I think it's a good thing for women to see as they go into the holiday season, when there's so much

stress and tension."

The two women had hoped to do small tours for women's groups and supper clubs, and eventually do a video of it for public television. But it's hard, Dahill says, to get people to commit to a show that's brand new.

"We have friends who are the music directors at St. Therese's Church in Branford," Dahill says. "They said they'd run it and give us a chance. So this year we're delivering the baby, and next year, if someone sees it and wants to run it in a larger sense, that's great."

The show runs just over an hour, she adds. "We didn't want to make it a long production. We want to give people a chance to take this big bubble of stress called the holidays, pop it, laugh, and go back into their lives refreshed," she says.

"People are just too tense. What the show tells us is life is not a Norman Rockwell painting. If your cookies burn, so what? Let yourself off the hook."

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Contact Sandi Kahn Shelton at sandish@mindspring.com.