

Droll role from the North Pole

'Mrs. Claus in Menopause' plays Westerly

By Kristina Dorsey Published on 12/11/2008



Shanna Wells stars in "Mrs. Claus in Menopause," a musical by Kathy Dahill of Westerly, on stage at the Westerly Armory Friday and Saturday nights.

There's nothing like an eye-catching title. Which brings us to "Mrs. Claus in Menopause."

Heck, you could even call it "Mrs. Claus in Menopause: The Musical."

In this one-woman, song-sung comedy, the title character is, in fact, going through menopause, even though she's 500 years old.

But the real heart of the show is something most people can identify with: trying to do too much and suffering for it.

Kathy Dahill, the Westerly resident who wrote the piece, explains that Mrs. Claus - you can call her Doris - is experiencing work-and-life overload. She serves as the central office for her husband's corporation. She's the caretaker for her children and her elderly parents. And, when the show opens, she's in the thick of all things Yuletide because it's

Christmas Eve.

She is, to put it simply, stressed.

Ultimately, Dahill says, "she realizes only she can save herself. She's living this craziness and realizes it's all self-imposed. Nobody is making her do this - she is making herself do this. She finally creates boundaries and says, 'No.'

"Our message (to audience members) is to look at their lives and make their health a priority - particularly women, but really everyone who is overextended."

Dahill created the show in 2003, inspired by friends who developed health problems because of the significant stress in their lives. She wrote the songs herself, and she co-wrote the script with Patricia Souney of Guilford.

Dahill has long been involved with theater, studying it at Emerson College and taking part in invitation-only BMI/ASCAP workshops. Her shows have been staged around New England. Among them is a stage work, commissioned by the state of Connecticut, about gambling called "Wanna Bet?," for which she wrote the music.

Starring in "Mrs. Claus" is Shanna Wells, a professional actress. And providing lots of behind-the-scenes help on the production is Dahill's husband, Christopher Sweitzer, as Dahill herself points out.

There will be two performance stops for "Mrs. Claus" this month: one in Westerly on Friday and Saturday, benefitting the Westerly Armory Restoration; and one at Rhode Island College in Providence on Dec. 19, benefitting the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

Dahill describes the "Mrs. Claus" score as traditional Broadway, with songs that are hummable and happy. The show's final number, though, is the ballad "What Is Christmas," which focuses on what the holidays are really about - relationships. That is a revelation that Mrs. Claus finally, and happily, has.

"Mrs. Claus in Menopause," 8 p.m. Fri. and 2 p.m. Sat., Westerly Armory, Railroad Avenue, Westerly; \$15 in advance, \$18 at door; benefits the Westerly Armory Restoration: (401) 348-6563.