

Comedy, music, dance make 'Camelot' a winner



Brad Morrison as Valerin the Vicious and Jolene Pattison as Queen Mavis rehearse for Camelot the Panto at the Pond Playhouse in Halifax last week. (INGRID BULMER / Staff)

Bunny Shore sat in the front row for three years, watching her husband Lowell Shore crack up the audience at the Theatre Arts Guild's annual pantomime.

Then she decided to join him.

For the last nine years, Shore has been musical director for the Halifax holiday happening that's an annual tradition for many families.

The Prospect resident eagerly anticipates taking her seat at the piano for Camelot the Panto beginning Nov. 29 at the Pond Playhouse.

The show runs Thursdays to Saturdays at 8 p.m. until Dec. 15, with five additional matinee performances that were sold out three weeks before opening night.

Written by U.K. author Ben Crocker, Camelot the Panto is a traditional pantomime, a spoof combining lots of music, dance, acting, the odd political quip and some local references.

“The comedic aspect, coupled with the music, makes it really enjoyable,” says Shore, who holds a degree in music from Mount Allison University and taught music in public and private schools in Halifax.

“I fell in love with the art form. I love the freedom the actors can take to interact with the audience. It makes it more enjoyable for everyone.”

Camelot the Panto features newcomer Paul Deveau as Prince Arthur, Emma Cruddas, back for her fourth pantomime, as Guinivere, TAG veterans Jolene Pattison and Terry Coolen as the evil Queen Mavis and Merlin, and Lowell Shore as the dastardly More-Dredd.

“He loves playing bad guys,” beams Shore, noting that her dentist husband has a big booming voice and a big onstage presence.

More-Dredd has an entourage of “five crazed-looking witches in fabulous costumes,” including his right- and left-hand servers Camilla (Rayna Smith-Camp) and Matilda (Ashley Grant), said Shore. And Camelot even includes the traditional English Dame, played by Stuart Martin under the stage name Connie Clatterbottom.

As musical director, Newfoundland native Shore, who began playing piano at three, gets to pick the music.

“I try to find things that work well onstage, that have good energy, that evoke a specific feeling. I try to find balance. My husband and I don’t listen to pop music — our children are grown — and if you like a certain pop singer, older and younger people in the audience might not be familiar with them.

“The numbers also have to work with the choreography.”

She said some are more movement than dance, like the finale that features the entire cast of 21. There’s also a Charleston, and a number adapted from Michael Jackson’s Thriller set to another song.

“We like to perform things people recognize. They can clap, tap and get involved.”

For the last three years, Shore, director Angela Butler, stage manager Lorne Abramson and his daughter, Melanie Abramson, have been the tight-knit creative team behind the show.

“The pantomime has something for everyone,” said Shore, who was also music director of Red, Hot and Cole, TAG’s salute to Cole Porter.

“Even those too young to understand the plot enjoy the fabulous costumes and the music, which is the universal language. They see people running around onstage, a whole bunch of little kids, and by the time the show is done, everyone leaves with smiles on their faces.”

Tickets are \$16; \$13 for members, seniors, students and children. They are available at Ticket Atlantic, 451-1221 and www.ticketatlantic.com, at participating Atlantic Superstore outlets and at the box office at the Halifax Metro Centre.