**FORT SALEM THEATER HOSTS**

**THE SINGING ANCHORS**

SALEM – The Singing Anchors (Albany news celebrities Jerry Gretzinger, Jessica Layton, and Benita Zahn) return to Fort Salem Theater this summer with their first Mainstage show in three years. *The Singing Anchors: From San José to Broadway and Bacharach* debuts with two matinées the weekend of July 25-26, and an evening show and two matinées on August 1 and 2.

 Jerry Gretzinger was recently recalling the early days of the singing anchors. “We’ve come a long way since Benita said to me, ‘Hey, I’ve got a friend with a theater. You wanna sing?’” That was in the fall of 2009, when they each brought four songs to Fort Salem’s artistic director Jay Kerr, who arranged them into the first incarnation of the Singing Anchors. The show was so successful that the group set out to perform original arrangements and themed stage shows. From those shows, the group branched out into touring shows of varied lengths, and has performed in some of the region’s most prestigious performance venues.

 “Other than putting our cabaret Christmas show on the Mainstage a year ago, the anchors haven’t appeared together on the big stage since 2012,” notes Kerr. “When Jerry did *Music Man* in Clifton Park in 2013, Benita and Jess did a show together. Last year, Jess had just given birth to her first child, Benita performed at Park Playhouse, and Jerry starred in *Women in My Life,* a new musical, at Fort Salem. So we’re really excited to have them back on the summer stage this year with a totally new show.”

 *The Singing Anchors: From San José to Broadway and Bacharach,* subtitled *Songs that Shaped a Generation,* musically chronicles the vast influence composer and arranger Burt Bacharach had on the sound and sensibilities of the latter half of the twentieth century. With his longtime writing partner Hal David, Bacharach produced, wrote and arranged for Dionne Warwick, giving her “Walk on By,” “I Say a Little Prayer,” and “Do You Know the Way to San José?” While Warwick was topping the charts, Jackie DeShannon recorded their “What the World Needs Now Is Love,” which became an anthem for a troubled world as it transitioned from the sixties to the seventies. Bacharach-David tunes peppered the era’s films, including “Alfie,” “The Look of Love” from *Casino Royale,* to the Oscar-winning “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ on My Head,” from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.* In 1968, he and David wrote the Broadway musical *Promises, Promises* with playwright Neil Simon, giving Warwick yet another hit, “What Do You Get When You Fall in Love?”

 Bacharach’s personal and professional life took a new turn as he ended his fifteen-year marriage with actress Angie Dickinson to marry and collaborate with Carole Bayer Sager, writing “That’s What Friends Are For,” recorded for the American Foundation for AIDS Research by four musical giants performing together for one recording (Elton John, Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, and Stevie Wonder). He won an Oscar with Sager for the “Theme from *Arthur.”* The now 87-year-old Bacharach’s career was revived in the nineties when he appeared singing with Elvis Costello in the Austin Powers movie series, and he and Costello went on to write the album *Painted from Memory.*

 The Singing Anchors’ ninety-minute show pays tribute to each of Bacharach’s hits and collaborations, and offers a close look at his one Broadway musical. “Bacharach wrote only one Broadway show,” Ms. Zahn has said, “because he didn’t like the fact that each night the show was a little different. He was a perfectionist. Records are about perfection. In live performance, anything can happen. And does.”

 No television performers know “live” better than local news people, who report from the field as new details come in, or who improvise in the anchor chair when late breaking stories totally rearrange a planned newscast. Benita Zahn and Jessica Layton share anchor duties on WNYT, Newschannel 13, with Jim Kambrich. Jerry Gretzinger left the anchor chair at channel six to take on an information and public relations vice-presidency at the Colleges of Nanoscale Sciences and Engineering in Albany. Being a singing anchor provides a balance to the serious issues with which all those in the news profession deal.

*The Singing Anchors: From San José to Broadway and Bacharach* opens Saturday afternoon, July 25, with 2 PM matinées Saturday and Sunday, July 25-August 2, and an evening performance, Saturday, August 1, at 8 PM. For more information, visit the theater’s website (fortsalemtheater.com) or call the box office, (518) 854-9200.