**FORT DIRECTOR CELEBRATES**

**FIFTY YEARS IN SHOW BUSINESS**

SALEM — As the final entry in the tenth year of production by Fort Salem Theater current management team, the Fort’s Artistic Director Jay Kerr celebrates fifty years in show business with a Farm-to-Table Dinner Theater event onsite at Gardenworks Farm on Saturday, August 20, at 5:30 PM, and at the Cabaret at Fort Salem Theater on Sunday, August 21, at a 2:00 PM matinee. *Kerr and Company in Concert Cabaret* features songs and celebrity stories from a career that covered half a century and that brewed both on Broadway and in Hollywood, and settled in Salem, New York, in 2006.

The “Company” includes his wife, Lynne, and New York actor/singers Emily Reeves and Eric Sorrels, who played the leads in this spring’s world premiere of Kerr’s *Alice of Old Vincennes: A Musical,* at the Red Skelton Performing Arts Center in Indiana*.* Former television news anchor Jerry Gretzinger and his wife Erin will make a special appearance at the Gardenworks Farm-to-Table performance on Saturday.

“I’ve actually been a paid professional for fifty-one years,” Kerr revealed recently, “but one of them was really bad, so I’m ignoring it.” That career began at McCarter Theatre, a professional company on the campus of Princeton University, which also spawned the world premieres of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* and William Inge’s *Bus Stop. “*I was hired to accompany songs and play incidental music for a production of Aristophanes’ *The Birds* while I was a college sophomore, skipping classes and working on my suntan.”

Flirting with expulsion for two more years, “I pulled it out by writing my senior thesis about musical theater.” Interviewing producers, directors, and writers in 1967, he quite remarkably predicted a significant change in the musical form and the emergence of Stephen Sondheim as the major force in theater composing, supplanting Richard Rodgers and Lerner and Loewe. “Actually, Steve Sondheim told me that was going to happen. I just wrote it down,” confessed Kerr. Sondheim’s *Company* in 1970 and *Follies* in 1971 forever changed the form and formula for modern musicals.

After eight months holding cue cards for television’s *Captain Kangaroo,* Kerr was drafted into the Vietnam War. “I ran a theater at WAC Headquarters at Fort McClellan, which was so successful I was sent to the war.” He helped create a touring show program with the 1st Cav, and produced shows that were selected as part of the Command Military Touring Show unit throughout the war zone.

Surviving the war, he moved to Manhattan and began his career as a theater musician. Judith Ann Abrams, who has since become a multiple Tony Award winning producer, produced his first musical which had a limited run on Broadway, a spoof of *Camelot* for children (“forty years before *Spamalot”*) and optioned his second, a *Pinocchio* in which the puppet was black (“five years before *The Wiz”*), which Kerr and his writing partner eventually produced off-Broadway.

In his Concert Cabaret, Kerr will be telling stories about the celebrities that have crossed his path, some of whom were famous then, and some who became famous. He recounts how the then unknown Barry Manilow was interviewed as his replacement as an accompanist for a singer at the legendary Continental Baths in the 1970’s, where Kerr worked on the bill with Bette Midler before she eventually met and hired Manilow.

As a voice teacher, coach, and conductor, he worked with, among others, legendary director George Abbott, Joanne Woodward, Sandy Dennis, *ET’s* Dee Wallace, and consulted on theater and film projects, including a musical film which Richard Dreyfuss had commissioned for Ms. Midler. He coached Phil Silvers to a Tony Award for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.* He taught and accompanied twenty Tony winners on a CD of the children’s Hanukkah classic, *The Odd Potato,* including the late Hal Linden (TV’s Barney Miller) and *A Chorus Line*’s Donna McKechnie, both of whom he plans to celebrate in story*.*

“I’m not planning on revealing any dark secrets about celebrities, mainly because I don’t know that any. But there are some funny stories and some ironic ones,” he says, which he plans to intersperse with songs he has written along the way. “It’s pretty hard to cram fifty years into sixty minutes, but if I use a minute and one second per year, I’ll be able to leave ten seconds for laughter and applause. That should be enough!”

*Kerr and Company in Concert Cabaret* accompanies a Farm-to-Table Dinner at Gardenworks Farm on Saturday, August 20, at 5:30 PM ($65 includes, dinner, tip, taxes, and performance) and Sunday, August 21 ($25 includes show, coffee, and dessert). Reservations are required for dinner and requested for the Fort Salem performance, and are available by calling (518) 854-9200, or going on the theater’s website (*[fortsalemtheater.com](http://fortsalemtheater.com)*).