**FORT SALEM HOSTS**

**AN AFTERNOON OF FUNNY SONGS**

SALEM, NY — The third in Fort Salem’s series of Sunday Afternoon Cabarets comes to the Washington County venue Sunday, May 21, at 2:00 PM, with humorist Byron Nilsson’s intimate one-man program of funny and forgotten pieces, “Rhyme on My Hands: A Tribute to the Comic Song.”

Nilsson is an actor and writer who appeared in several musicals at the New York State Theatre Institute, was featured in two episodes of *Law and Order*, and as a playwright has been produced at the New York Fringe Festival and the Ensemble Studio Theatre. A former chef, he served for thirty years as restaurant critic for Albany’s alternative newspaper, *Metroland*. In his spare time, he keeps bees and grows garlic and San Marzano tomatoes on his small Montgomery County farm.

Classics by Flanders & Swann, Noël Coward, and Tom Lehrer share the bill with heretofore lost songs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including “Why Do They All Take the Night Boat to Albany?” and “Asleep in the Deep.” There are opportunities for audience participation during choruses of “Lydia, the Tattooed Lady” and Fats Waller’s “Hold Tight.” For the intellectuals, there’s the poetry of Robert W. Service, with the musical setting of “The Cremation of Sam McGee.” For the letigious, free legal advice in Dave Frishberg’s “My Attorney Bernie.”

“We appeal to the intellect. Our humor is the humor of clever wordplay and well-wrought rhymes. Many in our audience do their crossword puzzles in ink,” he jokes. After a recent performance of the temperance ditty, “Father’s a Drunkard and Mother Is Dead,” nearby saloons noted a significant drop in business.

Mr. Nilsson appears regularly at Saratoga’s Caffè Lena, also performing his “Songs to Amuse” at Schenectady’s Van Dyck Restaurant, Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, the SUNY Albany Performing Arts Center, Albany’s Eighth Step Coffeehouse, with the Musicians of Ma’alwyck, and at the Otesaga Hotel.

“Rhyme on My Hands” follows the Fort’s East Coast debut of Shanara Gabrielle’s “Tilting at Windmills” and the four-part harmonies of Benita Zahn’s “Women Who Sing.” Pianist Deborah Young-Weiler will cap the spring series on the theater’s Mainstage Steinway on June 4 with a varied program of popular and gospel music.

Fort Salem’s artistic director Jay Kerr notes, “We used to serve cheesecake and charge $25. Now tickets are $20, and we have complimentary coffee. We’ve reduced the price and reduced the calories.” Dessert is available for purchase. Reservations are strongly suggested since seating is limited. More information is appears on the theare’s website ([fortsalemtheater.com](http://fortsalemtheater.com)); tickets can be purchased by calling the box office at (518) 854-9200.