**FORT SALEM THEATER**

**STARTS SUMMER SEASON**

SALEM, NY — Fort Salem Theater kicks off this year’s summer season on June 23-25, with the annual visit from the repertory troupe of the Rose Center Theater in Westminster, California. This year, show director Tim Nelson and his associates travel east with a new show written by Nelson himself, *Rip Van Winkle: The Musical.*

Billed as a story for the ages, all ages, the *Rip* script retells Washington Irving’s classic story of a hen-pecked Dutch-American villager in the pre-Revolutionary War Catskill Mountains. Van Winkle is loved by his buddies at the local inn he frequents, and adored by the village children for whom he fixes broken toys. Rip tends to shirk strenuous work, to his wife’s often- and over-expressed dismay; his farm and family life fall into pathetic disarray.

In an effort to escape the constant barrage of criticism, Van Winkle literally takes a hike one day and manages to get lost in the local hills, where he happens upon a band of men, who claim to be the ghosts of explorer Henry Hudson’s crew. They treat him to some of their homemade brew. He falls into a drunken stupor, waking up twenty years later and returning home to find a new world, a democracy where George Washington is president and all his friends have passed on.

Irving’s story, published in 1819, celebrates the culture of the Catskills, a region he had never visited but had admired from afar while he was sailing up the Hudson. Going Irving one better as he was writing this musical, composer Tim Nelson spent time visiting Catskill villages and interviewing descendants of the villagers who would have been alive in the late eighteentrh century. Their Catskill quirks color his characters in a musical score written in classic Rodgers and Hammerstein form.

Tim Nelson’s soaring melodies will be sung by a professional group of actors with whom he has worked for decades (this is their ninth year visiting Salem!). The cast features Melissa Cook (Maria in last year’s *Sound of Music*), Mary Murphy-Nelson (Mother Abbess in *Music*), Chris Caputo (Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha*), and Nelson himself, all veterans of the nine years of musical classics the Rose Center Theater has imported to Salem. The script balances the music and dancing with humor, thus truly being an example of classic musical comedy, where young and old alike can enjoy the performances, laugh, and go home entertained.

On June 24, in league with Gardenworks Farm on Salem’s County Route 30, families can take advantage of Fort Salem’s Farm-to-Table Dinner Theater option. Dinner and theater tickets are discounted in a program that begins with appetizers at 5:30 PM at Gardenworks, and ends with the 8 PM show in the village of Salem at the theater.

Tickets for all performances, Friday and Saturday, June 23-24 at 8 PM, and Sunday, June 25, at 2 PM, and reservations (necessary) for the Farm-to-Table option, are available by calling the Fort Salem box office at (518) 854-9200. More information is available at [fortsalemtheater.com](http://fortsalemtheater.com) online. Fort Salem, Washington County’s Theater Home for Music, Musicals, and Cabaret, is located at 11 East Broadway, just east of the Main Street business district in downtown Salem.