**CALIFORNIA’S ROSE REPERTORY TROUPE**

**PLAY AT FORT SALEM THEATER**

SALEM, NY — The players from Westminster, California’s Rose Center Theater have arrived early this week to perform their brand new old-fashioned musical comedy, *Rip Van Winkle,* on Fort Salem Theater’s Mainstage. *Rip* opens Friday, June 23 at 8 PM, with subsequent performances Saturday, June 24, at 8 PM and Sunday, June 25, at 2 PM.

Director Tim Nelson, who lives in Huntington Beach, California, and has a summer home in Salem, drove the deconstructed set along with costumes and wigs across the country. An instructor at the Huntington Beach Academy for Performing Arts, a public charter high school, he is also Executive Director at the professional Rose Center Theater, which is owned by the town of Westminster. The Rose Repertory Troupe consists of professional actors and theater educators.

Nelson has moonlighted during the summer for almost thirty years, working in the Capital District as a director and musical director. This year, as in recent years, he will direct the Park Playhouse Young Adult production (this year’s offering is *Music Man.*) Tim found his way to Salem when he directed *Man of La Mancha* at Fort Salem in 2004. He seems to fall in love with his East Coast surroundings, having purchased a home in Salem a few years later. It’s that same affection for hills and views that led him to adapt Washington Irving’s 1819 tale, *Rip Van Winkle,* as an old-fashioned musical comedy.

Washington Irving grew up in Manhattan, where he lived until his mid-teens, when his parents fled the city for Tarrytown, in Westchester County, to escape a smallpox epidemic. It was then that he would venture up the Hudson River, where he became fascinated by the beauty of the Catskill Mountains, beauty from afar, since he wrote the most celebrated tale ever set in those hills before setting foot on Catskill soil. He was in England when he wrote the story about the simple man, Van Winkle, who goes for a long walk to escape his harridan of a wife, happens upon the ghosts of Henry Hudson’s crew, and, after a night of heavy partying, falls asleep for twenty years.

Tim Nelson will play Rip, young and twenty years older. His real-life wife, Mary Murphy-Nelson, will tolerate the jabs of art imitating life by playing Dame Van Winkle. Murphy-Nelson’s pitch-perfect comic timing has been on display at Fort Salem in Rose Theater imports *Brigadoon* and *Phantom.* When she believes that her husband is dead, she marries the evil and mercenary town mayor, played by Chris Caputo, who starred in Salem several years ago in *Man of La Mancha* and *Carousel.* The Rose’s go-to soprano, Melissa Cook, will play Rip’s daughter. The California crew is supplemented by local actors from Salem and Albany.

On Saturday, June 24, Gardenworks Farm and Fort Salem Theater collaborate on Farm-to-Table Dinner Theater. A four-course locally sourced dinner begins at 5:30 PM at the popular Route 30 farm/store, after which ticket holders travel to the village theater to join other ticket holders at the 8 PM performance. Farm-to-Table reservations must be made in advance.

Information and tickets are available by going online ([fortsalemtheater.com](http://fortsalemtheater.com)) or by calling the Fort’s box office at (518) 854-9200.