**FORT SALEM THEATER HOSTS**

**SOUVENIR: THE FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS MUSICAL**

SALEM, NY — Fort Salem Theater opens a co-production with Bridge Street Theatre, Catskill, from Friday, July 14, through Sunday, June 16, on the Mainstage at its Washington County venue. *Souvenir: The Florence Foster Jenkins Musical* is subtitled “A Fantasia” on the life of Mrs. Jenkins, the world’s most famous lousy singer.

The real-life Florence Foster Jenkins performed her vocals for society audiences in the late nineteen-thirties through 1944, singing mostly classical pieces and making several recordings. All the smart, famous people, including Cole Porter and Noel Coward, loved to hear her sing. The pinnacle of her singing career came in the fall of 1944 when two thousand people were turned away from her sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall.

*Souvenir* tells the story of Jenkins rise to renown in a twelve-year collaboration with Cosmé McMoon, her long-suffering piano accompanist. McMoon, a hugely unsuccessful songwriter, allied with Jenkins in an effort to bring meaning to his life. She allied with him because most of her other accompanists left in horror at her highly inaccurate attempts to duplicate melodies. Together they form what becomes a warm, platonic relationship: he working hard to get her to sing the right notes; she working hard to give him the sense of confidence he lacks in his personal life and his work.

*Souvenir* had its initial off-Broadway run at the York Theatre in Manhattan, and then, after a stop at the Berkshire Theatre Festival, opened on Broadway in late 2005. It starred Tony-winner Judy Kaye as Mrs. Jenkins. Meryl Streep was Oscar-nominated for playing the title role in the 2017 film, *Florence Foster Jenkins.*

Starring in Fort Salem’s version, which had its own tryout at Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill this past March, is opera diva Alison Davy. She has appeared in opera and oratorio internationally, including performances with the Prague Philharmonic, Centro Musica Antica and Parma Symphony in Italy, and Lincoln Center in New York City. She has sung with the Washington National Opera, at Caramoor, with the East Bay Chamber Orchestra in San Fransisco, in the Hamptons and at the White House. In fact, Alison has spent a lifetime singing pitch-perfect in preparation for this role in which she must consistently and amusingly sing off-key.

Ms. Davy is joined in Salem by the Fort’s artistic director, Jay Kerr, who, despite singing and acting appearances on Broadway while he was in college, has spent the majority of his seventy-one years, like McMoon, sitting behind the piano while someone else performs. He brings to the role of McMoon intimate knowledge of accompanying complicated performers, including Judy Kaye herself, and Sandy Dennis, Tovah Feldshuh, Anita Gillette, Donna McKechnie, Charlotte Rae, Elaine Stritch, and Joanne Woodward. He coached Broadway veteran Phil Silvers in his only Tony-award winning role, in Stephen Sondheim’s *Forum* in 1971.

Reviewers of the Catskill production called Alison Davy “laughingly brilliant,” and “endearing, with a giddy energy.” Comments on Kerr included “lovely, with just the right sense of the sardonic,” able to “lob one-liners at us with sculpted precision.” Cornelia Seckel, in the online *Culturally Speaking Journal,* wrote “Alison Davy and Jay Kerr, both outstanding actors and musicians, have a powerful connection, a bond so strong one forgets they are actors on a stage…”

*Souvenir* is directed by Florence Hayle, herself a Broadway performer who came out of retirement at the age of 82 to star in the 2011 Fort Salem musical, *Senior Moments.* J. Peter Bergman, in *Berkshire Bright Focus,* praises her vision as “a choice one, a grand one … wrapped in pretty parchment and a grand old satin bow.”

*Souvenir: The Florence Foster Jenkins Musical* plays July 14-16, Friday and Saturday at 8 PM and Sunday afternoon at 2 PM. Tickets and information are available online at *[fortsalemtheater.com](http://fortsalemtheater.com)* or by calling the theater’s box office, (518) 854-9200.