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Annisquam troupe tackles 'Annie Get Your Gun'

By *Gail McCarthy*
Staff Writer

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The rollicking troupe of the Annisquam Village Players will present Irving Berlin's musical "Annie Get Your Gun," opening Tuesday, with a cast of more than 60 actors and children, most of whom reside on Cape Ann.

As a preview to this show, a special tour takes place Friday evening, with a walking tour of eight private porches in the historic village. At the final porch, the participants will hear a few songs from the upcoming show.

"Annie Get Your Gun" first opened on Broadway in 1946, and had two revivals, in 1966 and 1999; the latter won the Tony Award for Best Revival, and starred Bernadette Peters.

Now the Annisquam Village Players will bring that production to Gloucester, telling the story of real-life characters from the 1800s such as the sharp-shooting Annie Oakley and Frank Butler, both stars in Buffalo Bill Cody's "Wild West Show."

This Annisquam show, for all ages, is full of toe-tapping familiar songs: "Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better," "You Can't Get a Man With a Gun" and "There's No Business Like Show Business."

Under the direction of Mary Curtis and Terry Sands, the Annisquam Village Hall stage has seen a flurry of activity as the casts rehearses in the final days before the show opens for its run.

"Everybody knows the music and it's a fun upbeat show," said Sands. "This is based on real people. Annie Oakley had this tempestuous relationship with Frank Butler, one of the best sharp shooters, and much of this story is rooted in reality."

The cast includes cowboys as well as Native Americans. The cast once again won an award in the recent July 3 Horribles Parade for best musical float.

Leads in the show are Victoria Fortune, who plays Annie Oakley, Larry Cook, who plays Frank Butler, and Pharrel Wener, who plays Buffalo Bill Cody.

Other major roles are filled by Ariel Sargent, who plays Winnie Tate; Gordon Baird, who plays Charlie Davenport, manager of the Wild West Show; David Cluett, who plays Tommy Keeler, knife-thrower in the "Wild West Show"; Michael English, who plays Foster Wilson, hotel owner; Keith McCarthy, who plays Sitting Bull, Sioux warrior and Annie's protector; Davia Meader, who plays Bella Brown, stage manager's girl; Deborah

Michel, who plays Dolly Tate, Frank's assistant; and Dominic Parry, who plays Pawnee Bill, owner of a competing western show.

Sands explained that Oakley — born in 1860 as Phoebe Ann Mosey — came out of the back country, where learning to shoot was an important skill to survive.

"But this is love story, with a few subplots as well," he said. "It's a very fun show and a colorful show."

The colorful nature of Annisquam and so many Cape Ann residents again surfaces, with a bit of historic connection to Ethel Merman, the actress for whom the role of Annie Oakley was written.

Peter Kovner, who serves on the board of the Annisquam Village Players, shared a story about his mother, Kathleen "Jane" Lane, who was a Broadway actress and dancer as a young woman. She worked with Merman as well as Ginger Rogers in those early years.

"My brother tells me that he introduced himself to Merman in the 1960s and said 'Do you remember my mom?' and she said 'Oh God, yes, of course. Your mom is a sweetheart,'" he related. Kovner's mother died earlier this year at the age of 97.

"She was a New England girl who went off to New York City with her parents," said Kovner, who would learn the details of her acting career only after her death from his older brother.

"She was part of a group of these wild young girls who were teenagers in the late 1920s into the 1930s, and many of these girls became quite successful," he said.

His mother, along with Merman and Rogers, were in a play together in 1930. The Broadway musical "Girl Crazy," by George and Ira Gershwin, is when Merman was discovered along with a then-19-year-old dancer, Virginia McMath of Texas, now known as Ginger Rogers. The 17-year-old Lane was also in the cast.

In a review by critic Walter Winchell, he wrote that a star was born with Merman "but keep you eyes on this long legged-star Jane Lane," according to Kovner — and that was his mother.

The last musical in which she performed was with Merman and Bert Lahr, best known for his role as the cowardly lion in Wizard of Oz, in Cole Porter's "DuBarry was a Lady."

Others in the cast of the Annisquam Village Players show are:

The children: John Andrew, show biz kid/Indian; Kavika Babson, Indian; Toni Rose Babson, Indian; Grace Boucher, Indian; Rachel Denney, Jessie, Annie's sibling; Jacob English, Indian, show biz kid; Jared English, Indian, show biz kid; Denby Fortune, show biz kid/Indian; Emily Frick, show biz kid/Indian; Sofia Gadbois, Nellie, Annie's sibling; Jared Gilman, show biz kid/Indian; Quenton Hurst, harmonica boy; Rhiannon Hurst, baby girl, Annie's sibling; Emma Jacklin, show biz kid/Indian; Sofie Moulton, Indian; Anthony Milne, Indian/show biz kid; Ted Moskal, Indian; Jillian Osmond, Indian; Julia Rousmaniere, show biz kid/Indian; Eva-Maria Rudler, Indian; Michael Silveira, Little Jake, Annie's sibling; Andrew Treat, Big Jake, Annie's sibling; Amelia Treat, Indian and Christopher von Lossnitzer, Indian.

In the chorus: Talman Fortune; Val Gilman, John Hentshel; Paul Hurst who is also in the Trio; Eric Jacklin,

who is also Running Deer; Devon Kelleher; Aedan McCarthy, who is also Mac and in the Trio; Liam McCarthy and Seania McCarthy, also a Can Can Dancer; Gina Milne, also a Can Can Dancer; Eric Raimondi and Paul Raimondi, Julia Silveira and Evy Stewart.

Also, John Moskal as Eagle Feather and Grace Papp as an Indian.

Andrew Rivenbark is a stage manager character in the play (Andy Archer) and is also the actual stage manager for the Village Players.

Cowboy Band: John Hicks on guitar, Jon Newcomer on drums and Susan Taormina on piano.

Production staff: Production manager, Seania McCarthy; musical director, Susan Taormina; choreographer, Deej Viau; set designer, Chicki Hollett; costume designer, Andrea Strump; program production, Stevie Neal; ticket sales, Linette French; prop coordinator, Catherine Boucher; publicity, Jane Deering; tech support and lighting, Tony Gentile.

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Annisquam Village Players events

The musical

What: "Annie Get Your Gun," presented by the troupe.

When: Aug. 9 to 14; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m., and Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m.

Where: Annisquam Village Hall, 34 Leonard St., in the Annisquam village of Gloucester.

Tickets: \$15 general admission; \$30 for reserved seating. Tickets online are at www.annisquamvillageplayers.org, or at The Bookstore of Gloucester, The Annisquam Exchange, and Lula's Pantry in Rockport.

Porch tour

What: The Porches of Annisquam 2011

When: Friday, 5 to 8 p.m.

Tickets: \$25 at The Annisquam Exchange and Annisquam Village Hall, both on Leonard Street, and on the day of the event. To order online, go to: <http://www.annisquamvillageplayers.org/production/fundraiser.php>.

Details: Some porches have views of Lobster Cove, Annisquam River, Annisquam Lighthouse and Ipswich Bay. The event concludes with a sunset serenade at 30 Norwood Heights.