

## Famous Castaways Return in Gilligan Musical

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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In episode 72 of *Gilligan's Island*, Hollywood director Harold Hechuba pays a visit and the castaways stage a musical version of *Hamlet* to try to impress him. For Michael King, who has watched all 98 episodes of the show multiple times, that plotline is a metaphor. What the Gilligan, the Skipper, *et al.*

did with Shakespeare, Ghostlight is doing with *Gilligan's Island*

: taking it out of its normal context (in this case, television) and trying to reproduce it in a different format (the musical) with limited technical resources.

Ghostlight's production of *Gilligan's Island: The Musical* opens a two-weekend run on Thursday at the Capitol Theatre, and King – the director and production designer – is taking his assignment very seriously. For one thing, the musical was written by series creator Sherwood Schwartz (who also gave us *The Brady Bunch*) and his son, Lloyd J. Schwartz, with music and lyrics by Sherwood's daughter, Hope Juber, and her husband Laurence. And the Jubers will be attending the March 4 Quad Cities performance.

But King also takes his *Gilligan* seriously, period. "There are so many levels of comedy going on in that show," he said. Add to that some of the topical material raised by the show – such as the space race and the Cold War – and that it might be the ultimate in high concept (a clear ancestor of *Lost*), and you've got the recipe for a classic. "There's definitely a reason it hasn't been off the air in 40 years," King said.

The Schwartz family tackled the *Gilligan's Island* musical in the early 1990s, but it's only been staged a handful of times. The reason, King said, was that the family wanted to ensure that productions remain true to the original series. "They've been very selective of who they'll let do it," he said.

The principal cast includes Nick Hulstrom as Gilligan, George Schulz as Skipper, Bob

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Weinberg as Thurston Howell III, Peggy Freeman as Lovey Howell, Rochelle Buske as Ginger, Andy Lord as the Professor, and Linnea Ridolfi as Mary Ann.

King said he'd had his eye on Hulstrom for Gilligan for months, but the Professor was hard to cast. It was a Prenzie Players production of *The Tempest* (there's that Shakespeare again!) that showed King that Lord was ideal for the Professor. Both roles require an actor to spit out a lot of syllables that most people will find hard to understand, but Lord makes that connection easier.

While the story for the musical is new, it will have plenty of familiar elements, from guest stars to "coconut contraptions" to dream sequences. But it will also have a lot that's fresh. Gilligan is trying to save the world, and the songs add an emotional life to the characters that the show never had.

Musically, the play is omnivorous, including styles as diverse as country waltz, calypso dance, and the classic Broadway showtune. And, of course, there's that impossibly catchy theme song  
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The director said he's encouraged the performers not to mimic the original actors but to stay true to the characters. But how will audiences react to something that takes *Gilligan's Island* so seriously  
, when its appeal is so heavily based on kitsch?

King said he's not concerned, but he clearly hopes that people might re-evaluate the show based on the musical. "Folks are going to come see this show because they love the characters and *Gilligan's Island*," he said. Yet the script "rekindled my love affair with the show I had 20 years ago. I heard Gilligan's voice again."

*Gilligan's Island: The Musical will be performed at the Capitol Theatre in downtown Davenport on March 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, and 13. Showtimes are 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. Sundays. Adult tickets are \$12. For tickets or more information, visit (<http://www.ghostlighttheatre.org>) or call (563)505-7507.*