

Husband and wife have starring roles in 'Gypsy' coming to Savannah Center

by **Staff Report**
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Deborah Gibbons' Mama Rose has met her match – Mr. Gibbons. It all happens in the Smash Productions musical “Gypsy,” which plays Oct. 14-16 in Savannah Center.

Gibbons plays the lead role of Mama Rose, an obsessed stage mother. She guides her daughter Louise – played by Pinky Bigley – from child star to burlesque queen Gypsy Rose Lee

Another daughter, June – played by Dawn DiNome Wetzel – also hits the acting big time.

Mama Rose is supported along the way by Herbie, her talent manager, booking agent and one true love.

Herbie is played by Garry Gibbons, who just happens to be Deborah's husband. Working on stage together is old hat from these two Villagers.

“Garry says it's cheaper than therapy,” said Deborah, who has teamed with her husband in acting roles for about two decades. The two also ran a dinner theater.



Deborah Gibbons as Mama Rose teams with husband Garry Gibbons as Herbie in the musical “Gypsy” coming to Savannah Center Oct. 14-16.

Being on stage, “gives us a lot to talk about,” Deborah said. “We get a lot more rehearsal than most folks because while no one’s watching we get to rehearse at home while cooking, making the bed, doing the laundry, and while we’re swimming in the pool.



“It’s always fun to work opposite each other because we support each other and we know each other’s quirks. We trust each other, we have faith in each other, and we love watching each other succeed.”

The musical “Gypsy” has been marked by success since it debuted on Broadway in 1959. It is based on Gypsy Rose Lee’s biography. The music is by Jule Styne with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Songs include: “Everything’s Coming Up Roses,” “Small World,” “Together (Wherever We Go)” and “Let Me Entertain You.”

There have been numerous revivals and a 1962 hit movie starring Rosalind Russell as Mama Rose and Natalie Wood as Gypsy.

Among the stars who have played in stage productions: Ethel Merman, Angela Lansbury, Bernadette Peters, Patti LuPone and Audra McDonald.

Bringing Mama Rose to life is a demanding task.

“Number one is the mental gymnastics of understanding, creating and telling the story of Mama Rose,” Deborah said. “And on the lighter side a challenge is getting from one costume into the next when you have about only 30 seconds.”

But the joy of playing one of the most iconic musical roles makes it worthwhile for Gibbons.

“It embodies all the emotions of a lifetime; ambition, desire, love, anger, manipulation, and all with great challenge. It is both overwhelming and exhilarating.”

Mama Rose is the engine that drives this musical.

“Mama is the backbone of the musical,” Gibbons said.

“Everything starts with Mama Rose and affects the lives of everyone else in the production. It’s all about Mama.”

The talented local cast includes Mark Kirschenbaum, Sherry Mistler, Jane Maloney, Marlene Caplis, Tony Oteri, Bob Petrucelli and Howard Kirschenbaum



Local students Aven Wood and Sofia Sallee play young June and Louise in “Gypsy.”

The cast also includes local Charter School students. Aven Wood and Sofia Sallee. They play Louise and June as children. Other kids in the cast: Zada Wood, Arianna Ogerio, Maci Natolino, JoJo Sallee and Benjamin Keefe.

“Gypsy” is produced by Susan Feinberg and directed by Bob Stehman. Choreography by Barbara Byers and Mary Ann Rockenbach directs a seven-piece orchestra. Photos by Jeff Jagmin

