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## 'Ship of Fire' production draws capacity crowd

Posted By JACK EVANS, SPECIAL TO THE INTELLIGENCER

Posted 2 hours ago

Historic events and names, an ill-fated love match, tragedy, bravery, corporate greed, humour, lively music and dancing, all play a part in "Ship of Fire" which held its premiere in Mount Tabor Playhouse here Thursday evening.

The event drew a capacity crowd to the small but interesting theatre and also officially launched the 2009 summer season for the Festival Players of Prince Edward County.

This was a season which almost didn't happen, except for some last minute major donations and a leap of faith by the summer theatre company's board to anticipate strong audience support for this all-Canadian, three-show season.

The show is yet another musical history creation by talented county artist Suzanne Pasternak, this time the ringleader of a team which also includes director, Marion de Vries, Tom Leighton and Bernie Gaw, all accomplished professional theatre artists. It is a love story set in the historic burning and sinking of the paddle wheeler luxury steamship Ocean Wave off Prince Edward County's Long Point in late April of 1853 with the loss of about three dozen persons, men, women and children. (The actual number has never been established.)

The company has put together a well-seasoned cast representing some of Canada's most experienced stage talent. The rich tenor voice of Michael O'Hara as Canaan Alexander, a roguish deck hand and the full-bodied soprano of Natasha Pasternak as Patience O'Hara, an Irish immigrant who falls in love with and marries Canaan, blend beautifully in several tender and tuneful love duets. Other key performers include Martin Julien, Eliza-Jane Scott and Stephen Sparks, all with lengthy and successful track records in theatre productions.

The music is capably led by Tom Leighton who also arranged it and assisted with the lyrics, backed up by violinist Zeke Mazurek and cellist-guitarist Alyssa Wright.

The show opens with the classic hymn tune, I Feel the Winds of God today, an

Irish folk tune, along with a tolling bell and the names of those lost in the tragedy.

The scene changes to "Dulmage's Anchorage," a hard-drinking, fun-loving fishing community on Long Point with the lively folk tune, Erie Canal.

On yet another vessel, a schooner, a powerful men's trio sings a rousing song about "men of sail," mocking the smoke-belching steamships.

The singing as solos, duets and ensembles with careful accompaniment is enjoyable throughout. One popular Quinte resident, former MP Lyle Vanclief commented that he had already seen two advance productions, thoroughly enjoyed the opening night and plans on returning with a group of guests for yet a fourth go-round.

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One can anticipate many future performances in various venues for this show, which is a hugely successful follow-up to Pasternak's first folk opera, Minerva.

Ship of Fire runs through July 25 in the Mount Tabor Playhouse, Wednesday through Saturday at 8 p. m. plus 2 p. m. matinees on July 15, 18, 22 and 25.

Single tickets are \$29.95, with special rates available for students, seniors, groups and flex passes for all three shows.

  
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For more information or tickets, call the box office, (613) 471-1991 or toll free, 866-584-1991, or email [www.festivalplayers.ca](http://www.festivalplayers.ca)

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