

Who needs Broadway – it's all right here!

Southland theatre enthusiasts don't have to venture to the bright lights of Broadway to enjoy world-class performances – it's right here on their doorstep.

The Invercargill Musical Theatre Company and Invercargill Repertory Society have calendars brimming with quality shows this year.

Invercargill Musical Theatre Company immediate past president Philip Fraser said shows they performed were the latest versions available, many of which were still showing globally in prestigious locations such as Broadway.

"We strive to uplift the quality every year and ensure we perform shows of the highest calibre," he said.

The final curtain only dropped on the acclaimed *Cabaret* last Saturday (May 1), but already the company has embarked on rehearsals for its next show, the classic *Oliver*.

The extensive experience of Alex Derby, who has performed the role of Fagan in the UK and Hong Kong, will undoubtedly be a feature of the August show. The company's popular theatre restaurant will also be back to entertain audiences at the end of the year.

Repertory also boasts an impressive line-up with its Repertory House hosting an array of acts during this month's Arts Festival.

On June 25-26, its Youth Drama students will stage a production of four short plays – the culmination of their studies this year, while Nathan Kennedy will direct *Face to Face* in July.

A Gilbert and Sullivan play will be performed in August, along with the Southland round of the New Zealand One Act Play competition.

The Invercargill Musical Theatre Company and Repertory Society each received funding of \$25,000 and \$45,000 respectively from the ILT Foundation recently, while the Invercargill Licensing Trust also granted the theatre company \$20,000.

"If we didn't get that funding from the ILT then we would have to increase tickets prices quite exorbitantly ... their support enables us to make theatre accessible to everyone," Mr Fraser said.

Iconic musicals were being "revamped" on the global stage to ensure their continued appeal to a large spectrum of theatre-goers and Mr Fraser said the Invercargill company had its sights set on the Andrew Lloyd Webber version of *The Sound of Music* next year.

"We are getting the latest scores here in Invercargill ... we're always in the mix when a major show comes out and we believe we can do it in Invercargill," he said.

"Directors are queuing up to come down to Invercargill and direct Southland people – and that speaks volumes."

Southland performers were highly-regarded for their focus and dedication.

"I think the Southland talent gives these shows a unique flavour ... we're blessed with the talent we have."

Invercargill also boasted some impressive facilities with Repertory House receiving a \$500,000 makeover during the past few years.

Secretary James Horne said plans this year included the purchase of modular staging.

"We're titivating the place now to make it even nicer," he said. "Southland people love the theatre and we've been inundated with bookings for it."

“We're delighted with the response we get from people attending our shows – it's a reflection of the quality of people we have performing.”

ILT Foundation and Invercargill Licensing Trust chairman Alan Dennis said the dedication of those involved in the arts sector to produce shows contributed to the overall culture of the city.

“Anyone who has had the pleasure of attending can testify to the amazing quality of the performances – it's incredible what can be achieved through sheer commitment and an obvious passion for the theatre,” he said.

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