

Husband & Wife Performers Present 'Gettysburg,' A Parody

By Nancy Jennis Olds

Imagine crossing the historical drama of the Battle of Gettysburg with the Mel Brooks' Broadway hit show "The Producers" and you kind of get the idea that "Gettysburg, The Musical" isn't even remotely a serious dramatization of the historic clash.

Billy Finch of Silver Spring, Md., and "The Lovely and Talented Minerva," who is actually his wife Carol Finch, decided to spice up the Battle of Gettysburg with their own musical version largely, but not exclusively, appealing to the Baby Boomer generation.

"It's the Rat Pack meeting Pickett's Charge," according to Billy Finch, who has toured the country performing his Musical Comedy Legends Stage Show for over two decades.

A Civil War buff, he decided a year ago to combine his loves for impersonation and the Civil War. Well known for impersonating such celebrities as Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles, Louis Armstrong, Johnny Cash and Rodney Dangerfield, Finch decided to combine his talents with his avid interest in everything Civil War and take it on the road.

The opening song, "My Kind of Town is Gettysburg," based on "My Kind of Town" by Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen, is sung by Billy Finch as if he were Frank Sinatra, a member of the 137th Hoboken Sharpshooters.

"We aim to keep the high ground," he

sings. It is a spot-on impression of "Ol' Blue Eyes" with an accurate account of the history of Gettysburg.

In another parody, Billy Finch is comedian Rodney Dangerfield who becomes Union Gen. George Gordon Meade because "I get no respect." The newly appointed commander of the Army of the Potomac was criticized for failing to pursue Gen. Robert E. Lee's army after its defeat at Gettysburg.

Finch's impression of the comic is so uncanny that he won an RCA Rodney Dangerfield Look-A-Like/Sound-A-Like Contest in Washington, D.C.

Carol Finch, a veteran singer, plays several characters, such as Miss Belle. She and her husband sing "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" by George Gershwin, with the revised lyrics: "I'm with Lincoln, we are going to take the high ground; I'm with Davis, Bobby Lee will save us... Let's call the whole thing off!"

The couple does a hilarious parody of the Jackie Gleason TV show "The Honeymooners," except that this time it's War of 1812 veteran and Gettysburg patriot John Burns and his wife Alice — not historically true, but a touch of artistic license — quarreling because Burns wants to fight the Confederates and his wife forbids it.

Alice (Carol) sings "You Could Get Shot Outside" to the lyrics of "Baby It's Cold Outside" by Frank Loesser. When she can't restrain her husband from protecting his town, she sings "Crazy," written by Willie Nelson, in the voice of

country music legend Patsy Kline.

Alice is "Crazy for feeling so lonely, I'm crazy for feeling so blue... I'm crazy for trying and crazy for crying and I'm crazy for loving you."

Picture a bearded General Lee sounding a lot like Sammy Davis Jr. singing "I've Gotta Beat Meade" to the tune of "I've Gotta Be Me" by Walter Marks. Then there's "Pickett and Pettigrew" to the music of "Love and Marriage" by Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen.

In this number, Finch keeps swapping out Union and Confederate hats to illustrate the maneuvers from both sides while singing: "Well this is

Pickett and Pettigrew, Pickett and Pettigrew, this is the angle that we're going through. Let me tell you, brother, you can't have one without the other."

Of course, no Gettysburg musical would be complete without the King, "Tupelo, Mississippi's very own" Elvis Presley, singing a medley of tunes including "Dixie" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The appearance of Elvis in a Confederate uniform is comic, but Billy Finch's weave of the traditional songs is lovely.

Other songs feature Col. Joshua Chamberlain at Little Round Top, Gen. Winfield S. Hancock, and Longstreet

and Lee. Lest viewers misunderstand the parody, the printed program notes, "We honor and hold in highest esteem the men and women who lived and died during the Civil War."

The Finches plan to take "Gettysburg, The Musical" on tour from Emmitsburg, Md., where it started, to Gettysburg and beyond. You don't have to be a Civil War buff to enjoy the show, but a basic familiarity with the Battle of Gettysburg and the age of the Rat Pack might keep you laughing so hard that you might hum "I've Gotta Beat Meade" all the way home.

For information visit gettysburgthemusical.com or call (877) 700-1612.



Left: Carol Finch, "The Lovely and Talented Minerva," portrays Belle and her husband, Billy Finch, a Union soldier in this historical and hysterical musical. Right: Billy Finch sings a medley of traditional songs as a Confederate Elvis Presley. (Nancy Jennis Olds)