

Artword Artbar
 15 Colbourne St
 Hamilton

arts hub, live music venue,
 art gallery, neighbourhood bar
 in the heart of James North arts district

905-543-8512
 905-912-9083

Licenced cafe-bar.
 Homemade light meals

Open Wed-Sat from 6 pm
 plus special events

www.artword.net/artbar

For immediate release: May 7, 2015

Artword Theatre's James Street musical returns to Artword Artbar, May 20 – 30.

Artword Theatre's hit musical *James Street* is coming back to Hamilton. The popular show, a mad musical dash through the history of Hamilton, will be returning to Artword Artbar, May 20 - 30, 2015.

Artword Artbar has been a key player in the revitalization of Hamilton's downtown. Located at 15 Colbourne Street, half a block west of James Street, the café-bar has been presenting music, theatre and dance in an intimate setting (60 maximum) for over five years.

Written and directed by Ronald Weihs, *James Street* has a cast of six (plus two musicians), who play multiple roles as Hamilton's history flashes by. Songs are by Mark McNeil, one of Hamilton's finest singer-songwriters and a well-known journalist for the Hamilton Spectator. His latest CD, *Flashbacks*, featuring songs from the show, is nominated for three Hamilton Music Awards.

Choreography is by Learie Mc Nicolls, well known in the Toronto dance scene, who has recently pulled up stakes and moved to The Hammer. Judith Sandiford is both producer and designer.

James Street begins with a mysterious encounter between a contemporary Hamiltonian (played by Charly Chiarelli) and Hamilton's town crier from 1840, Paola Brown (played by Jeremy Shand). The two watch in amazement as historical characters (played by Paula Grove, Valeri Kay, Gordon Odegaard and Ryan Sero) come alive.

They see how pioneer dentistry was done, witness George Hamilton and his cronies (Hughson and Durand) plot out the town, watch a farmer advertise for a wife "with a good back", drop into Billy Carroll's cigar shop and bookie joint to bet on the first Around the Bay Road Race, and take a ride on the new Electric Railway. They witness the sad demise of Bessie, Queen of the Bootleggers, and the strange fate of Evelyn Dick.

There is a sequence honouring Hamilton's soldiers through two World Wars. McNeil's song, "Private Riley", imagines a universal soldier in the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI). The Rileys adopted the song to celebrate their 150th anniversary, and Mark collaborated with the regimental band to produce an award-winning video that received national exposure.

Charly Chiarelli is well known for his widely popular one-man shows about growing up in Hamilton as a Sicilian immigrant. He is just returning from Sicily, where he has been starring in a film production, *The Lemon Grove*, based partly on his stories.

The idea for *James Street* arose in 2010, when McNeil was working on a special edition of *The Spectator*, *The Story of James*. Mark suggested to Ronald Weihs and Judith Sandiford that Artword produce an original play, partly based on the first-person stories he was collecting. Ron and Judith ran Artword Theatre in Toronto from 1994 to 2006, creating many original works for theatre, until the condo boom displaced them and they transferred their activities to Hamilton.

James Street

An Artword Theatre production

Written and directed by **Ronald Weihs**

Original music by **Mark McNeil**

Choreography by **Learie McNicolls**

Produced and designed by **Judith Sandiford**

Music performed by **Mark McNeil** and **Ron Weihs**

Artword Ensemble: **Charly Chiarelli, Paula Grove, Valeri Kay, Gordon Odegaard, Ryan Sero and Jeremy Shand**

Venue: Artword Artbar, 15 Colbourne Street, Hamilton.

Showtimes:

Wednesday May 20 to Saturday May 23 at 8 pm

Sunday May 24 matinee at 2 pm

Wednesday May 27 to Saturday May 30 at 8 pm.

Tickets: \$25 (Fri & Sat), \$20 (Wed, Thur, Sun), \$10 preview May 20 only.

(Book tickets online www.artword.net/artbar or call **905-543-8512**)

Press quotes:

Right now, there's a delightful little show being performed by Artword Theatre. Happily, it provides a lusty connection with Hamilton's past. It's called *James Street*, and it pays homage to a neighbourhood that's just evolved and evolved.

The show, however, is much more than that. It's a love song to Hamilton, the good, the bad and everything in-between.

An ensemble cast embraces comic and romantic moments, doing robust service to Mark McNeil's evocative score.

—*Gary Smith, The Hamilton Spectator*

This play has the ability to tell our story and to entertain us mightily at the same time. I recommend it to anyone who cares about this city.

Artword Artbar is a great place to see it. It's an intimate venue, where every seat is a good one. The stage is a comfortable height, and the actors at times inhabit the audience part of the floor as well. The proprietors have an obvious love of their city and make an effort to present and celebrate it in their productions. Their respect for their patrons shows in every detail, from the LED-style stage lighting (to reduce excess heat build-up in the room) to the bright, clean washrooms, to the craft-style beer on tap at reasonable prices, plus a very welcoming vibe.

—*Tony Kilgannon, Ontario Arts Review*