



GEORGE VETTER PHOTOS

**LEFT:** From left: Ann Bronson, Darren Hull, Richard Bowman and Cameron Gates-Lira strike a pose during a dress rehearsal of *The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!)*. **ABOVE:** Cameron Gates-Lira, left, and Ann Bronson rehearse a scene from the production.

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of “Cabaret” and “Chicago” round out the parody.

Eventually, the heroine learns how she will pay her rent — maybe.

The show is directed by Patrick Lathrop, the Coaster’s executive director. Katherine Lacaze, who has performed in several productions, is assistant director and choreographed two of the five scenarios.

“I was looking for singers who had the confidence to sing,” said Lathrop about the four-member cast.

“There are singers, and then there are *singers*,” he added. “If you ask somebody, ‘Do you sing?’ and they go, ‘Oh yeah, I sing.’ Then you ask somebody, ‘Oh yeah, I sing really well’; there’s the difference.”

And then there are singers who can act while they’re singing — not always an easy thing to do.

But Darren Hull, Richard Bowman, Ann Bronson and Cameron Lira, who have worked together in many Coaster productions, had the confidence and acting skills Lathrop sought. Their experience and friendship also are evident in the way they engage on the stage.

### Layers of jokes

Lathrop, who has a degree in musical theater, said he enjoys the parodies and jokes in the show.

Although each version stands as a “musical” by itself, there are satirical nods within that scenario to other musicals written by each composer. “Corn!,” for instance, includes hints of “Carousel,” “Oklahoma,” “The Sound of Music,” “The King and I,” “Cinderella,” “Flower Drum Song” and “South Pacific.”

“Once we got into it, I realized the music was very complex,” Lathrop said. “Like the Sondheim — they’ve (lyricist and composer Joanne Bogart and Eric Rockwell)

taken the Sondheim, but they’ve parodied him, and in doing that, they’ve taken what

he does, which is difficult, and made it even more difficult within the parody.”

Most of the shows being parodied Lathrop has either seen or worked on. An audience should be able to understand the underlying winks to other works as well, he added.

“If you’ve seen the movie, you’re going to get the jokes,” Lathrop said. “But the silly little shows stand on their own. The characters are strong. The songs are really delightful little songs, and if you listen to the lyrics, they’re very funny.”

He points to a lyric sung in a speakeasy: “Here at the speakeasy it’s hard to say.” Or, “The hills are alive ... but you’re half dead.”

Lira and Bronson say they discover nuances at every rehearsal.

“Every bit is nine jokes or deeper,” Lira said. “We really had to do our homework.”

### ‘Safety net’ of friendship

Bronson, who played Dolly Gallagher Levi several years ago in a Coaster production of “Hello, Dolly!,” is familiar with a character in the Jerry Herman scenario.

The woman poses majestically at the top of a staircase and claims, “I can’t sing or dance, but I’m the star of the show.”

“I’m not doing the Irish accent this time (as she did with Dolly), but I realized that I’ve been this character,” Bronson

said. “I’ve seen you before.”

While Bronson’s favorite scenario is the speakeasy, Lira enjoys the Sondheim version “because I get to sing snippets of songs of roles I haven’t played before,” she said.

Among those songs is one about birds flying around her head:

*“Why do the birds fly  
Around my golden hair?  
Are they building nests up  
there?”*

Lira, who plays the heroine June, Jeune, Juney-Fae, Junita and Juny, remembers her mother doing the “can’t pay my rent” melodrama by using a napkin to imitate the roles.

Heroine (napkin, like a bow, at the side of the head): “I can’t pay the rent.”

Landlord (napkin, like a mustache, above the top lip): “You must pay the rent.”

Hero (napkin, like a bow tie, at the neck): “I’ll pay the rent.”

Heroine (napkin, like a hair bow): “My hero.”

Although the music is complex and the choreography is tricky, the cast members obviously enjoy performing together, thanks to the friendships built on and off stage.

“There’s a safety in that; we have the freedom to explore, the freedom to make idiots of ourselves,” Lira said.

“It’s fun to have people you’ve worked with over the past 10 years to help you pull off a joke.” **CW**

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