

the company in April, and this will be the show's first year without the help of Nate Bucholz, who directed "Shanghaied" for five years before Brown.

"It's been quite a transition," said Patricia VonVintage, costume designer and Astor Street directing manager, whose job is to handle some of the business aspects of the play so the director can focus on directing. "It's been very fast-paced. 'The show must go on' is a good way to put it."

### Old flavor, new spins

But with the changing of the guard comes a chance for new ideas.

Judith Niland said the shift in leadership gives this year's production a new edge. Niland has been a part of Astor Street since 1985. She held various positions, including stage manager and production manager. She retired in 2016 but returned this year as a consultant to mentor VonVintage and other Astor Street members about the business side of a play's production, including systems of handling money and sponsorship.

"There is a new energy to it, a new vibration to the whole thing," Niland said. "It's younger and fresher. The director has been trained by all the veterans. She'll keep the old flavor but put new spins on it."

Mundel focused on recruiting trained singers and dancers from the community who have never participated in the performance before. While it's common for cast members to quit mid-season, Niland has been impressed with retention this year.


"(Mundel) filled the cast right from the start, which was unique," Niland said. "I haven't seen that done in years. She's only had, like, two people drop out, which is unheard of. That also is really refreshing. It reminds me of the old days when everyone was really excited and it was new."

The production is a demanding time commitment for a cast of entirely volunteer actors. The cast started rehearsing at the beginning of May, and rehearsals are held every weekday, Monday through Friday, though not every cast member attends every rehearsal. The 26 roles are each rotated between two or three different actors throughout the performance season.

The community aspect of the production keeps volunteers returning year after year. Kathy Matthews will play the role of Mama for the 30th time this year, according to Mundel. Bill Brooks, whom Mundel dedicates this year's production to, will perform as the drummer for his 18th year.

### For the love of it

Niland said the actors who volunteer to devote their time to the production make the melodrama unique.

"You can find other melodramas that run every year ... but they have equity actors," she said. "Sure, they're going to stay 15 weeks because they're being paid. These people stay with it because they love it, and that's a big difference. You can feel it on stage." 



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTOS

Ashley Mundel, Stephanie Osborn and Lora Posey.



Julian Thomas and Raul Espericueta act out a scene from the iconic production.



From left: Dena Tuveng, Julian Thomas, Lexus Blackston and Madison Beauparlant in the upcoming production of 'Shanghaied in Astoria.'