

## Work On Stage An Opportunity To Take On A Different Role

By CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN

When "Side By Side By Sondheim" premiered at the Cotuit Center for the Arts, it represented a return to theater for Todd L. Bidwell of Davisville Road, East Falmouth, after his not setting foot on a stage for nearly 24 years.

What kept him away for so long, he said, was his career following his graduation from Emerson College in 1987 with a degree in theater education. "That was the last time I had been in a play and on stage with the exception of Pops Goes The Summer when I emceed that event," he said. "When I graduated I did my student teaching and once I completed that, I decided not to get into teaching. I got really involved in tourism." The former vice president at the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Bidwell is the general manager of the Island Queen.

So what drew him back? First was the itch to go back to the theater. "The acting bug started to fester a little bit, and I saw this as a good opportunity," he said.

But the fact that his life partner, Mark S. LiCalsi, was directing the play did not hurt either.

They are one of two couples in the play, which runs through Sunday, February 20. The other is Glenn Wall and his wife, Laura S. Garner, of County Road, Monument Beach.

While working on a creative project such as this is a first for

together in "The Grand Duke," the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta that was being performed in Amherst.

They have since acted in two other plays, the musical "Victor/Victoria" and "The Secret Garden," the last of which took them to the Dundalik International Maytime Drama Festival in Ireland.

Ms. Garner has also had the fortune of directing her husband in a play, doing so in 2002 during the Falmouth Theatre Guild's production of "Chicago."

Although it may appear that egos could get in the way, both couples agreed that the experience of participating in a play with a loved one is a rewarding process.

Neither couple brings their personal baggage into the theater, although Ms. Garner laughed that both "will get our little ribs at each other now and then, our little in-jokes. But they are very professional and hopefully we are, too."

As the director, Mr. LiCalsi admits he has had some power over Mr. Bidwell he normally does not have at home. "It is a really great opportunity for me to tell him what he is doing wrong and have him say a line again, and he does it without talking back," Mr. LiCalsi laughed.

When asked if he could elicit the same reaction in their home, he said, "it would be somewhat different."

Joking aside, he said it has been a pleasure to work with Mr.

where Mr. LiCalsi was living at the time. They met through a mutual friend and had a long-distance relationship for one year, Mr. Bidwell said, before "Mark drove a truck with some luggage and personal belongings and joined me here."

Mr. LiCalsi came to Falmouth with extensive training in the theater, having been a resident actor in a regional theater company in Sacramento for several years.

Since coming to the Cape he has kept a strong connection to theater, first working as the house manager for the Cape Playhouse in Dennis before becoming the managing director for the Cotuit Center for the Arts. He held that position from 2004 to 2007.

"Side By Side By Sondheim" represents the second play he has directed on the Cape. In 2005 he directed "A Joyful Noise" by Edward Padula at the Cotuit Center for the Arts.

The focal point of this play, he said, is the music with Mr. Bidwell's role as the narrator tying all the scenes together.

Because the play was written in 1976, Mr. LiCalsi said the narration was somewhat dated. Together with Mr. Bidwell, he restructured this part of the play to make it more topical.

Overall, he said, the collaborative process with Mr. Bidwell has been an enjoyable one. "It's been great fun, and we've had a lot of great laughs with it," he said.



GENE M. MARCHAND/ENTERPRISE

A pair of local couples are playing key roles in the Cotuit Center for the Arts' performance of "Side By Side By Sondheim." Those lending their talents to the show are actors Glenn Wall and his wife, Laura Garner, of Bourne, as well as narrator Todd Bidwell and his partner, Mark LiCalsi, the show's director, who live in Falmouth.

herently interesting because "it is so rich," attributing that to Stephen Sondheim's genius.

It is the actors, he said, who have been able to translate that genius onto the stage. He lauded Mr. Wall and Ms. Garner for their ability to lend their talents to the piece.

"They are unmistakable," he said. "They really have a natural chemistry between the two of

they are into it."

Ms. Garner said there is no competition between her and her husband when on stage. Rather the two derive a sense of joy from it. "It is huge fun," she said. "We can be honest with each other, and I think it is fun to connect with him and play these different parts."

She said she prefers acting with Mr. Wall more than directing him,

his wife feel a strong connection to this musical revue. "One of the subjects Sondheim likes to do is marriage and relationships, specifically one of them is the little things you do together and the foibles of being married," he said. "So we give each other knowing winks and glances and let the music and lyrics tell the story. It is neat being a married couple acting in a play