

Real husband, wife perform 'They're Playing Our Song'

BY RANDALL G. MIELKE

For Sun-Times Media

An actor's life can sometimes be a bit confusing.

Michael Mahler, who along with his real-life wife, Dara Cameron, will perform opposite each other beginning on Aug. 18 in the Fox Valley Repertory's production of "They're Playing Our Song." "They're Playing Our Song" is based on the real-life, romantic relationship of composer Marvin Hamlisch and lyricist Carole Bayer Sager.

"I do not know if this show for us is life imitating art or art imitating life," said Mahler, who has been married to Cameron for two years. "I hope the show will not bleed into our real life because there is some fighting in the show and we don't want that in our marriage. We hope to leave the work at the theater."

"They're Playing Our Song" is a musical comedy with a book by Neil Simon, lyrics by

'THEY'RE PLAYING OUR SONG'

Aug. 18-Oct. 9

Pheasant Run Resort & Spa, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles.

Tickets, \$29-\$39

(630) 584-6342

foxvalleyrep.org

Carole Bayer Sager and music by Marvin Hamlisch. The play centers on Vernon Gersch (played by Mahler), a successful composer, and Sonia Walsk (played by Cameron), an equally successful lyricist, who start working on a project together and then find themselves in bumpy romance.

The play is basically a two-character show, but each of the two characters, Vernon and Sonia, has a three-person chorus acting as their inner voices.

"Each of us has voices in our heads who also sing back-up for us," Mahler said. "There are three people behind each of the two main characters."

Originally, "They're Playing Our Song" opened at the Ahmanson Theatre in December 1978, then moved to the Imperial Theatre on Broadway where it ran for more than 1,000 performances from Feb. 11, 1979, to Sept. 6, 1981. In the Broadway version, Robert Klein played Vernon Gersch and Lucie Arnaz played Sonia Walsk.

Mahler acknowledges that the show hit close to home for he and his wife.

"I play the piano a little and I am a composer as well," he said. "So I read the script on the couch with my wife, who plays Sonia, and we both thought, 'That's how it really is. It is difficult to live with a writer.'"

Although the husband and wife thespians are playing opposite each other in this show, it is not the first time that they

have performed together.

"I went to the theater school at Northwestern University," Mahler said. "I was in the musical theater program. Dara and I worked together at Northwestern; that is where we met."

Oddly, the two were cast in "They're Playing Our Song," but did not audition together.

"We both auditioned, but we did not even read together," Mahler said. "Not even at callbacks."

Both Cameron and Mahler knew there was a chance that one of the two would be cast, but not the other.

"We have been in that situation," Mahler said. "That's the life of an actor. It is always tough. When it happens, you have to be there and support your partner."

And Mahler thinks the support that they have for each other in real life will only enhance the play in which they are appearing.

"Well," he said, "if nothing else, the chemistry is there."



Fox Valley Repertory present "They're Playing Our Song" at Pheasant Run in St. Charles. | COURTESY OF FOX VALLEY REPERTORY