

A&E

Little theatre, big thrill

Need to know

Who: Cher Lyford

What: The Underpants

Where: Aldershot Players
West Plains United Church,
549 Plains Rd. W., Burlington

When: April 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 and
May 1 dinner shows.

April 22 show only.

Tickets: \$35 (includes dinner), \$18
show only April 22.

Call: 905-381-1441

BY GARY SMITH

"I'm in my 50s. I need to be who I am."

Cher Lyford has no difficulty confronting time. The Hamilton actress appearing in Steve Martin's comedy *The Underpants* makes neither excuses nor apologies for her age.

"Why would I? I'm not a kid anymore and that's fine with me. Life is all about moving on and facing who you are."

Lyford is refreshing. She makes no bones about the fact she loves playing someone else onstage.

"That doesn't mean I don't like me, though," she hastily adds.

"I got involved with theatre in high school. I played the maid in an Agatha Christie mystery. I was the first to get bumped off. My sister talked me into auditioning for Woody Allen's comedy *Play It Again, Sam* in Belleville, where I grew up. I got the part. Opening night my legs shook so badly I thought the set must be falling down. It didn't. And I kept upright, too."

Being a hairstylist

Lyford was co-opted to do hair for a number of little theatre shows.

"I was doing the '50s hairstyles for the musical *Bye Bye Birdie* when somebody got sick. I had to go onstage in two small parts without being prepared. My own hair wasn't done, so I plopped a hat on my head for one rôle and a blond wig for the second one. I had to tap dance in a spandex outfit, and I ended up with a bag of frozen peas on my knee to get the swelling down when I fell."

Lyford came to Hamilton about 10 years ago. Pretty much first thing she did was go to one of the local theatres.

"It's a great way to meet people."

When she's not onstage or doing something behind the scenes, Lyford's doing hair in

her living room. "I call it my personal styling space. I look after family and friends. I don't want a real business because it's too time consuming."

Lyford is doing her second big role with Aldershot Players. In the fall she played Mollie in *The Mousetrap*, and now she's the nosy neighbour in *The Underpants*.

"And no, I'm not the one whose pants fall down."

Lyford likes the intimate playing space in Aldershot where the audience is practically in your lap.

"Audiences that come there are so supportive. There's a real community feel to things. But that's something petty general in little theatre. Groups help each other out with costumes and props. There's a sense of we're all in this together."

Lyford feels folks in the Hamilton area are lucky to have so much local theatre.

"There are great opportunities to perform or just get involved. And you can go to a community theatre show almost every week."

The Underpants may be by Steve Martin, but the play is based on something from just after the turn of the century.

"There's a lot of silliness in it," Lyford laughs. "I play a woman who has missed her chance. She's living vicariously through the affairs of the woman downstairs. I like her because she's so out there."

For Lyford, community theatre is a great experience. "I was always incredibly shy as a child. Being onstage changed that. It's just so liberating. I'm a bit of a goofball hambone, I suppose. And that's OK."

"Theatre frees me. When I'm onstage I'm someone else. In a strange way that helps me to be me."

Cher
Lyford

Gary Smith has written on theatre and dance for *The Hamilton Spectator* for more than 30 years.