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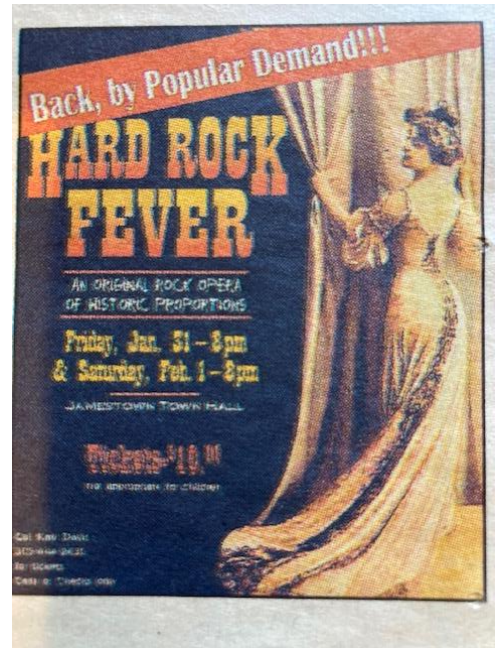
Jimtown Rocks

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT
Pianist John Guske watches the actors perform while accompanying them as part of the A-Flat Minors.
Below: Bob Buckley, center, is the director of 'Hard Rock Fever.' He also plays the Preacherman.

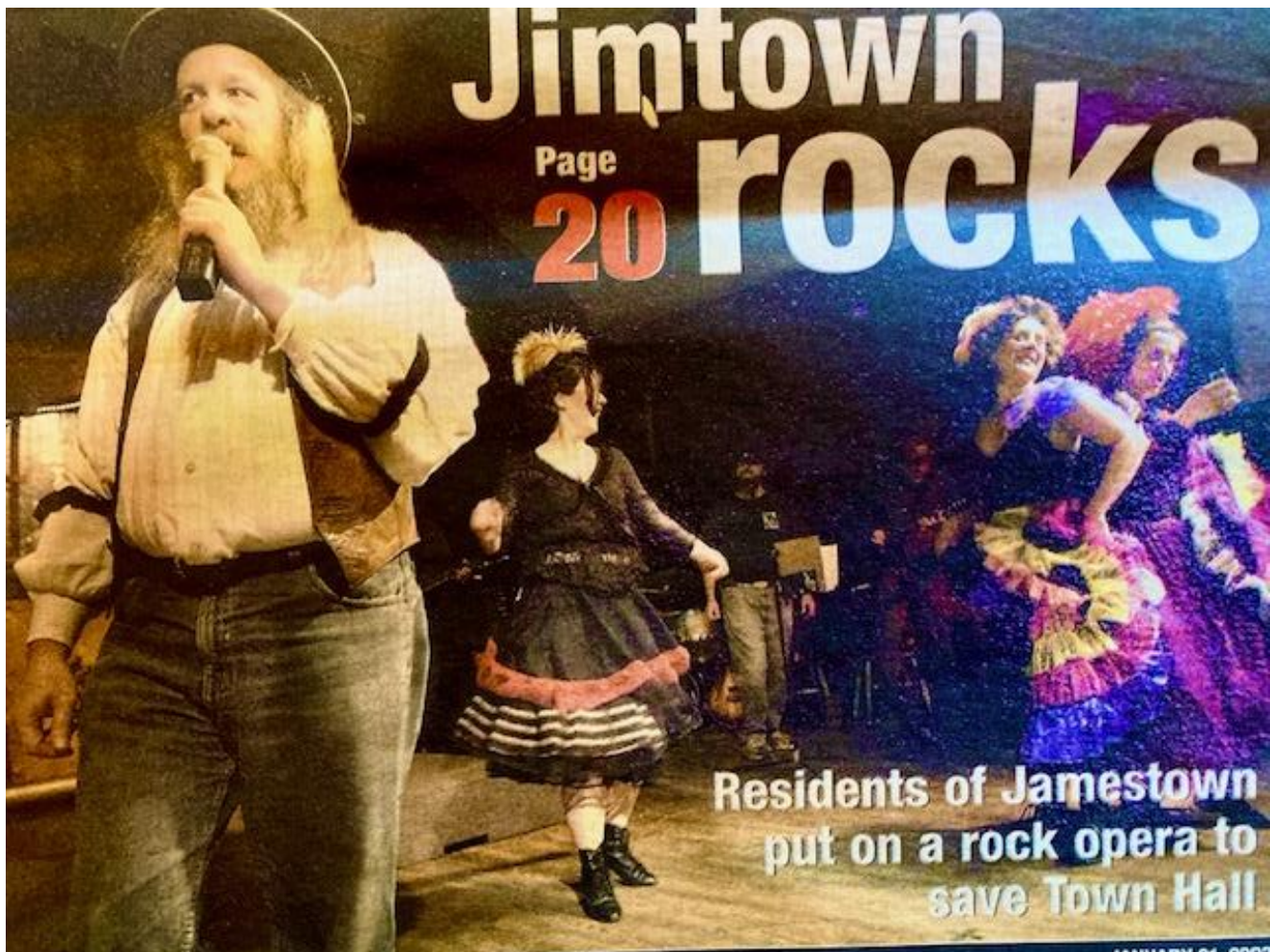
Inspired by their town's colorful history, Jamestown locals stage an original rock opera

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Story by Matt Sebastian • Camera Staff Writer / Photos by Marty Calvano • Daily Camera



Residents of Jamestown put on a rock opera to save Town Hall





LADIES NIGHT Suzanne Marie, right, Ja'Vayne Metzger, center, and Nancy Farmer, left, dance while rehearsing 'Hard Rock Fever,' a rock opera written and performed by Jamestown residents. The performance, loosely based on the town's history, will be put on as a benefit to raise money for a new roof on the Town Hall.

JAMESTOWN -- Bob Buckley (Dedra's Smith's x) is having a little trouble getting his women lined up.

"Can we get the harlots over here?" he shouts, frantically motioning to his left as people mill about inside this mountain hamlet's aging Town Hall. "And how about the pious ladies on the other side?"

The dozen or so women, some in outfits more revealing than others, line up across from one another and begin hurling insults: "Hussies!" accuses one. "Shrews!" hisses another. "Tawdry strumpets!"

Then the final blow: "Republicans!"

This scene draws guffaws from the assembled crowd, a gaggle of locals moonlighting as actors in "Hard Rock Fever," Jamestown's first original rock opera -- a rowdy, tuneful tale of miners, prostitution and natural disaster.

Gathered for a weekend rehearsal, the cast is putting the final touches on the highly entertaining show, which can be seen tonight and Saturday at the Jamestown Town Hall. The performances, the first since the piece debuted in November, are being staged by Jamestown Area Artists and Musicians (JAM) to raise money to restore the hall's rickety roof.

"OK folks," Buckley, the director, says, gathering his cast of would-be thespians for a full run-through. "I don't want you trying to be perfect. In fact, I want people trying not to be perfect, trying new things and making mistakes."

With that, the lights dim and two dozen actors and a six-piece rock band -- christened the A-Flat Minors -- bring musical life to Gold Rush-era Jamestown, a time when 10,000 tent-dwelling miners called the mountain boomtown home.

The two-hour show tells the story of French mine owner Ceran St. Vrain, who opens the Jimtown Palace, a saloon and brothel that offers "diversions natural to all men." The harlots take the stage doing cartwheels and dancing the can-can, dressed in flamboyant, low-cut dresses and garters that, in some cases, reveal more than a little skin. (The production, after all, is billed as "not appropriate for children.")

When the town's prissy women learn about the harlots in their midst, they round up their red-faced husbands and summon a preacher -- played with gusto by Buckley -- to run the ladies of the night out of town. The show is primarily played out in front of its primary set-piece, the well-stocked bar of the Jimtown Palace.

"And I caution you, Mr. Builder of Towns and Peddler of Sin," the ranting preacher warns St. Vrain during a visit to the saloon, "you can build nothing when the soul of man is dark with vice and perversion!"

The preacher introduces his three virginal daughters -- Faith, Hope and Chastity -- to deliver a message to the ladies, a pseudo-rap number that proves to be one of the show's highlights.

"It's plain and simple, and black and white," the girls sing. "The difference here is wrong and right/Give up your ways of lust and greed/Faith, Hope and Chastity are all you need."

Once Jamestown is rid of vice, disaster strikes in the form of the infamous 1893 flood, a 100-year deluge that kills many and leaves cholera and dysentery in its wake. Upon learning of the flood, the banished harlots return to act as nurses for the ailing townsfolk.

"Hearts of gold, that's what you got, girls -- hearts of gold," Sally, the ladies' madam, says. "Trollops, hussies and painted ladies on the outside, and hearts of gold on the inside. I never thought I'd see the day; they spit in your face and you just giggle and smile -- and you ain't even getting paid."

It may not be on the level, of, say, "Tommy," but Jamestown's production is a rollicking tale of ostracization and redemption offering a wild look into the history of this creekside town 18 miles northwest of Boulder. "Jimtown," as it was known, was incorporated in 1863 after a rancher discovered the fruits of its canyon -- namely gold, silver and fluorspar.

The late 1800s saw a population explosion as miners flooded Jamestown, driving out the Ute Indians who had called the area home. When the mining boom went bust around the turn of the century, Jimtown gradually faded into the quiet mountain town it is today.

Now, the hamlet is home to just 200 people, a mix of old-timers seeking refuge from hectic city life and others who commute to Boulder for work. Many are artists and musicians who can be found whiling time away at the town's only business, the 100-year-old Mercantile Caf, known affectionately as "The Merc."

"Hard Rock Fever" certainly captures the lively history of historic Jamestown; it's a great, toe-tapping tale spilled out onto stage -- but is it true?

"It's not factual at all," confesses Beth Brotherton, who plays one of the harlots. "We're not claiming to be historically correct. Other than the flood, we're not sure what's true. We're just trying to be entertaining."

The inspiration for "Hard Rock Fever," Buckley says, came after some of the women who ultimately would play the show's wildly-dressed harlots saw the film "Moulin Rouge" last year: "They came back from the movie and they said, 'Bob! Bob! Can we do that?'" he recalls.

It didn't take much convincing.

"I've helped put on children's shows in the past, and everyone always loved those," says Buckley, who spends his days screening potential employees for a Boulder headhunting firm. "So we said, 'Let's do

something for the adults.' Besides, the girls have always wanted to do the can-can for some reason."

The show came together during a one-month span late last summer, with Buckley writing the script -- subtitled "Deluge and Deliverance" -- while musical director Richard Jenkins penned most of the show's 17 songs, including the harlots' swinging introduction, "Ladies of the Night," and the tender duet "Forever."

Jenkins, an Emmy-winning sound engineer who does freelance work for the film industry, then assembled a band of local musicians, taking part of an existing outfit named the Neighbors and tacking on a few others.

When it came to casting, Buckley began recruiting friends and members of JAM. Most had no acting experience, although many, as musicians, were comfortable on stage.

"Bob just called one day and said he wanted me to be St. Vrain," recalls Dave Emmitt, a singer-songwriter who owns a heating and cooling business in Boulder County. "My band had just broken up, and I was just sort of looking for a new musical outlet. So I said, 'Sure, great.'"

Emmitt, brother of Leftover Salmon's Drew Emmitt, says the experience has transformed him.

"I feel like I'm back in junior high again," Emmitt says. "This is incredible; it's so fulfilling. I love playing music on stage, but I feel like this is sort of like that, but with this great bonus -- acting -- thrown on top."

Others had even less experience in the arts.

"I really wasn't planning on being in the rock opera -- it just kind of happened," says caterer Holly Smith, who would wind up on-stage as a harlot. "I never even sang Christmas carols before doing this."

Like Emmitt, though, Smith was shocked by how much she enjoyed it.

"This has been so great," she says. "People thought that it was going to be this silly production, but it turned out to be real professional. We surprised a lot of people."

"Hard Rock Fever" debuted last November with a pair of sold-out benefits that raised \$5,000 toward the repair of Town Hall, which is believed to need at least \$50,000 in repairs to its roof. Several hundred people turned out for each of those performances; many were turned away at the doors.

Tickets are selling briskly for this weekend's performance, organizers say. Some of the cast members already are talking about bringing the show back, perhaps taking it on the road to other mountain towns like Ward or Nederland.

"Oh, we'll see how it goes this time," Buckley says during a break in rehearsals. "It's such an undertaking to get 25 people and six band members together. Everyone's got a life and jobs and all that. But don't get me wrong -- this has been worth every minute of it."