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Revised with new feature material

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30th annual Welcome Yule: A Midwinter Celebration

Shea Theater, Turners Falls, MA

Dec. 12, 13, 14, 2014

The 30th annual Welcome Yule Midwinter Celebration comes to the Shea Theater in Turners Falls on Dec. 12, 13, and 14. Welcome Yule celebrates the return of the light with a delightful family show filled with music, dance, songs, stories and customs to drive the dark away.

This year's show is written and directed by long-time cast member Hattie Archbald, who has performed in the show for 18 of her 22 years. She is the first director in Welcome Yule's 30 year history who has literally grown up in the show.

The audience will be transported to a fictional medieval English village where preparations are underway to celebrate the Winter Solstice. Young folk in the village undertake a Robin Hood-style mission to steal from the rich and give to the poor so that the villagers can all celebrate a bountiful Christmas.

As always, Welcome Yule's signature carols, wassailing songs, stick dancing and mummers play will be featured, along with the passing of the Yule log, the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance and stage director Fred Momaney's version of the classic Robin Hood story. As many families return year after year to perform in Welcome Yule, the cast has come to be an annual festive community that recreates itself every year, from September, when rehearsals begin, to mid December when the final show's bows are taken and the set is struck.

Hattie Archbald's interest in seasonal singing and dancing was sparked when, at the age of 3, she attended The Cambridge Revels with her mother and grandmother. As the show drew to a close, Hattie pointed to a child on the stage and declared that she intended to be onstage herself next year.

To fulfill her daughter's wish to perform like the children on the stage in Boston, Archbald's mother Montserrat discovered that Franklin County was home to a similar annual show called Welcome Yule. Upon learning that participation in the show during those early days was contingent on showing up consistently at rehearsals, the pair enthusiastically joined the cast. Younger sister Blythe joined the cast for several years as well. A fall commitment to rehearsals that culminated in three performances became an important part of the Archbald family's annual activity schedule.

Archbald's role in the show has evolved as she has grown. Starting in the children's chorus, she transitioned into the teen group and now sings as part of the adult chorus. For a time she assumed responsibility for managing the children's chorus. Her lengthy association with Welcome Yule has given Archbald a long view of creating and directing her own production. She made note of directorial styles, visual effects, story lines and musical sequencing over the years, and has used that experience to shape her efforts this year.

Curiously for one so involved in public performances Hattie doesn't consider herself an actor. She is most comfortable coordinating and directing, finding satisfaction in the process of bringing a show to completion. Her one regret about her directorial work this year is that Welcome Yule with all its body of music is limited to one season of the year. A summer version of the show, drawing on the robust repertoire of music available through Welcome Yule connections, is definitely a glimmer in Hattie's eye.

Welcome Yule: A Midwinter Celebration will be performed at The Shea Theater, 71 Avenue A, Turners Falls, Friday and Saturday Dec. 12 and 13 at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, Dec. 14 at 2 p.m. Tickets are: \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and children five through sixteen; age four and under free. Families of five pay \$40. Reserve tickets by calling the Shea Theatre reservation line (413) 863-2281, or purchase tickets in advance beginning November 1 at Jones Library in Amherst, River Valley Market in Northampton, World Eye Bookshop in Greenfield, or Brattleborotix.com. For more information see the website at www.welcomeyule.org, check out [Welcome Yule on Facebook](#), or email contact@welcomeyule.org.