

Playwright's new comedy is full of belly laughs



Inspiration...Geoff Allen with belly dancer Fiona Harding who will be teaching the actors how to dance

Shrinking violets need not apply for a role in Devonport actor, writer and impresario Geoff Allen's latest production.

Described as spicy, sexy, racy and fast, the play requires ladies who aren't afraid to shake their bootie to take part in *The Secret Life of a Belly Dancer* to be staged at The Rose Centre in September.

Allen said the play was in the same genre as 'Ladies Night', a popular comedy about male strippers by fellow Devonport writer Stephen Sinclair.

"The story centres around Jamila and her return to New Zealand after a failed marriage to an Egyptian," said Allen.

"She works stacking shelves in a supermarket but secretly practices her belly dancing in the storeroom during her breaks.

"But when her secret is discovered, other women who work at the store ask her to teach them. It's hilarious but poignant too as we learn about the women's own lives and problems."

Allen wrote the play after seeing a performance by Devonport belly dancing teacher Fiona Harding last year.

Although she won't be performing in the play, Harding is providing technical advice and teaching the actors how to dance.

"Belly dancing is all about women being women and is a dance they can perform no matter what age or shape they are," she said.

"It has been around for thousands of years,

long before ballet was invented, and is performed in towns and cities in every country of the world.

"There are at least a dozen belly dancing teachers on the North Shore."

Allen said he was inspired to write the play after seeing his first belly dancing show a year ago.

"I was sceptical at first but when I saw the show I was blown away by the beauty of the women and the beauty of the dance," he said.

"I thought straight away that it would make a great play."

Allen thinks the play has great potential to be made into a film or produced by professional theatre companies who he is inviting to a performance.

The production features eight women and two men, one of which is played by professional actor Paul Norell, better known as King of the Dead in Lord of the Rings.

Allen has written and directed a play, 'King of the Road', based on Norell's experiences touring with the LOTR fans' roadshow.

That play is being staged at the Basement Theatre on March 9, 10 and 11.

• Auditions for 'The Secret Life of a Belly Dancer' are being held on February 28 and March 1. Contact Geoff Allen on 445 0042 or email gallen@clear.net.nz for details and audition scripts.

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