Some of the folks having the most fun in Clarence Brown Theatre’s current production of “Monty Python’s Spamalot” aren’t actors or audience members.

“Watch out for that big hole in the middle of the stage!” cautions King Arthur to his faithful servant Patsy early in the show. If you look into it, you’ll find the pit orchestra for the production – some of the finest musicians in town. And every one of them wears a big grin.

“The rehearsal process was really one big laugh-a-thon,” says music director Terry Silver-Alford. “The director, Bill Jenkins, encouraged the actors to make the show their own by bringing in comic bits and also integrating local references into the material, which is a tradition with this show.”

Those local references include a snatch of “Rocky Top,” among other things.

Silver-Alford, in his ninth year as the CBT’s music director, also teaches acting, musical theater and introduction to theater. He received his master’s of fine arts in theater directing from UT and his master’s of music in piano and composition from Western Michigan University before taking positions as director of musical theater at the University of Tulsa, the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point and eventually UT Knoxville.

Speaking of his current crew, he enthuses, “I have fantastic players who keep coming back for every show – I’m so grateful to work with them.” For this production, there are 14 musicians, three of them being keyboard/synthesizer players who must produce a variety of sounds through a system of numerous “patches,” or electronic samplings, that can convey anything from classic orchestral instruments to animal noises and sound effects.

“I missed the Big Ears Festival because I spent the whole weekend setting up the three keyboards for ‘Spamalot!’” laughs Michael Ponder, 16-year veteran sound supervisor for CBT.

Acoustic instruments include trumpets, French horn, trombone, violin, string bass, guitar, drums and a variety of woodwinds – the latter played by only two performers. One of them is Sheryl Howard, widely known in the area as a multi-instrumentalist who can do it all – composing, arranging, singing, playing, directing.

Howard, who is music director at Trinity United Methodist Church, is greatly enjoying this production and especially likes “The Song That Goes Like This,” which is a satirical (and hysterical) funny) take on the typical Broadway power ballad.

Another widely known “Spamalot” musician is Melony Dodson, whom you can hear weekdays as host/producer of WUTO’s “Morning Concert.” She’s also a choral accompanist for the UT music department, and pianist at Faith United Methodist Church on Dry Gap Pike.

“This is one of the ‘funnest’ shows I’ve ever seen or played. It’s truly hilarious, and it has really great music. And this band is totally nailing it!”

“My favorite song to play is probably ‘Find Your Grail. It’s just fun!’” Silver-Alford adds. “Knights of the Round Table,” the first big splashy production number in the show. The song is familiar to any Monty Python fan who’s ever seen the movie “Monty Py-
thon and the Holy Grail,” but “Spamalot” kicks it up quite a few notches.

“And of course there’s the great ‘soft shoe’ number, ‘Always Look on the Bright Side of Life,’” he says. “It sounds like a song we’ve all known forever – like an old vaudeville song from the 1920s.” The song was written for the 1979 movie “Life of Brian” and did indeed instantly have that “where have I heard it before?” quality.

Dodson allows that, for such an outrageous show, the rehearsal process has been fairly smooth and typical.

“Except I get to make cow sounds with the keyboard,” she grins. “That’s pretty fun!”