

Lighthearted romp with a few twists

Gilroy Dispatch

Posted: Friday, February 7, 2003 12:00 am

Martin Cheek



The cast of Lend Me A Tenor figure out what was going on during dress rehearsals Wednesday night inside the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

MORGAN HILL – The South Valley Civic Theatre will perform the farce "Lend Me a Tenor" as the inaugural play in its new home at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse today.

"I really think SVCT, with its past reputation of doing excellent shows, will do this new theater proud," said Kevin Heath, who plays the spineless opera company assistant "Max" in the play.

The adult comedy is a send-up of the world of grand opera, he said. World-famous tenor, Tito Merelli, arriving late for his role as Otello at the Cleveland Grand Opera, suddenly passes out from an unwise dose of relaxation aids. Max secretly takes Tito's place on stage and the confusion grows when Tito wakes up and there are two tenors to deal with.

The play was written by Ken Ludwig and originally opened on Broadway in March 1989, winning two Tonys, four Drama Desk Awards and three Outer Critics Circle honors.

It's set in a hotel room in 1934 Cleveland, Ohio, and much of the furniture on the stage was loaned by Rosso's Furniture Store.

The fast-paced twists and turns in the plot are sure to provide a fun evening for South Valley theatergoers, Heath said.

"Every character has to have a lot of energy to get through what they've got to get through," he said. "There's a few surprises in the show that the audience will not be expecting. They'll be rolling in the aisles."

Dave Leon of San Jose plays Tito and says he's developed a characterized Italian accent for the role.

"Tito is brash, he's a bit full of himself," Leon said. "But beneath all that, he's a bit of a softy. He has a soft-spot for Max."

"Lend Me a Tenor" has eight actors performing in it and Leon enjoys the close camaraderie this small cast provides.

"I enjoy shows with small casts because you get to know everyone" he said. "I like the intimacy of small shows."

Christine Varela plays Tito's wife "Maria Merelli," and it's her jealous streak that sets in motion the twists and turns surrounding the play's farcical plot.

"She's a jealous, high-strung, passionate woman," Varela said. "But she has a lot of love and passion for her husband."

Varela is impressed with the excellent design of the new Morgan Hill theater and says the best feature is the intercoms in the two dressing rooms which allow the actors to hear the dialogue on stage and know when they're suppose to get ready for their entrance.

JoAnna Evans plays "Diana," an opera singer with dreams of performing in the New York Metropolitan Opera. Diana slyly plans to use Tito to fulfill that dream.

"Diana is ambitious and talented and will do anything – anything – to get to the top," she said.

SVCT board member Steve Spencer plays the president of the Cleveland Grand Opera. He said he enjoyed developing the stuffed-shirt character.

"He is a man who is in charge," he said. "He loves to brow-beat Max, his assistant."

Pat Cianci plays "Julia Leverett," the chairman of the Cleveland Grand Opera whose aristocratic style is accented by the high-class black-lace with sequins dress she wears during the play.

"But the dress really came from the Gilroy Goodwill for \$5," she said with a smile.

Cianci and Evans both praised director Marion Pintello for how well they believe the SVCT's performance of "Lend Me a Tenor" has been developed.

"Marion is wonderful to work with," Evans said. "She's got a lot of clear vision. And she's willing to take input."

Dick DeBolt plays a bell hop in the play who, he said, because of all the confusion surrounding the mistaken identities of the two tenors, is "really kept hopping."

The show was produced by Marie Haluza and Janet Espinosa, and they encourage locals to come to today's opening of the show which will include a free reception in the lobby after the performance.

Haluza said the new 186-seat theater is truly a gift for SVCT and the South Valley community because it will provide a permanent place for five shows – 10 performances each – every year. In the past, the theater company has jumped around the three South Valley communities, performing at Gilroy High

School, Live Oak High School, a storeroom at Rosso's Furniture, and even on an outside stage at the San Martin Pumpkin Patch.

"Boy, it got cold some nights at the Pumpkin Patch," Haluza recalls with a smile.

Information:

What? Adult comedy about the mishaps of a world-famous tenor during opening night 1934 at the Cleveland Grand Opera Company. Performed by the South Valley Civic Theatre.

Where? Morgan Hill Community Playhouse at Monterey Road and Dunne Avenue.

When? Feb. 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28 and March 1 at 8 p.m. and Feb. 23 at 2 p.m.

How much? Adults: \$15; Students and Seniors: \$12.

Details? call 842-7469 or check the Web site www.svct.org.



CHRIS RILEY/Staff Photographer

Kevin Heath playing Max catches the eye of Maggie played by Jennifer Langford during rehearsals for 'Lend Me A Tenor' opening in the new Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

'LEND ME A TENOR'



WHAT? Adult comedy about the mishaps of a world-famous tenor during opening night 1934 at the Cleveland Grand Opera Company. Performed by the South Valley Civic Theatre.

WHERE? Morgan Hill Community Playhouse at Monterey Road and Dunne Avenue.

WHEN? Feb. 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28 and March 1 at 8 p.m. and Feb. 23 at 2 p.m.

HOW MUCH? Adults: \$15; Students and Seniors: \$12.

DETAILS? call 842-7469 or check the Web site www.svct.org.



Pat Cianci, playing Julia, surprises Tito, played by Dave Leon, during dress rehearsals for 'Lend Me a Tenor,' the South Valley Civic Theatre presentation at the new Morgan Hill Playhouse. 'Lend me a Tenor' is an adult comedy about the mishaps of a world famous tenor during opening night 1934 at the Cleveland Grand Opera Company. Performances are held at Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, on the corner of Monterey Road and Dunn Avenue. Performances will be held at 8 p.m. today, Saturday, Feb. 21, 22, 28 and March 1 with a 2 p.m. matinee on Feb. 23. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$12 for students and seniors. Details: 842-SHOW.

A fitting goodbye from the South Valley stage

Gilroy Dispatch

Posted: Saturday, March 1, 2003 12:00 am

Chris Riley





Dick DeBolt, 73, plays a bellhop in 'Lend Me a Tenor,' which is playing its final weekend at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. The show will be DeBolt's last performance after 14 productions with South Valley Civic Theatre.

MORGAN HILL – From playing a porter at a decrepit French inn to a bellhop at a reputable Cleveland hotel, Dick DeBolt, 73, makes his final exit from community theater with fond memories of stage mishaps, unforgettable characters and the support of fellow actors.

"It's a pleasure to work with people who have been in many more plays and who have assisted in pre-production activities more than I have," said DeBolt of working with South Valley Civic Theatre Company, with whom he has participated in 14 productions.

DeBolt, who is retired from IBM, made his theater debut in his high school senior play and continued with amateur work in college productions and radio. After moving to Morgan Hill in 1984, he performed for Gilroy's Center Stage and in 1992 was cast as the Captain in "South Pacific," his first play with South Valley Civic Theatre. Since then, DeBolt has continued appearing in the company's musicals and adult productions, playing mainly character roles.

"I have never really grown up," DeBolt said.

In his final role, in "Lend Me A Tenor," which runs through Sunday at the new Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, he plays a comic bellhop who is dying to meet the famous tenor but keeps missing his chance.

"I get my share of the laughs," DeBolt said. "I have great lines."

He said especially enjoyed the experience because, "the marvelous director encouraged me to play it broadly."

DeBolt was thrilled to play a part in the opening of the new Morgan Hill playhouse, where he played the part of emcee during its grand opening.

"I unabashedly feel it's an honor to appear in the first production of the new lavish Morgan Hill Community Playhouse," he said. Recalling times in the Gilroy High School Theater when his "dressing room was a nail," DeBolt appreciates the luxuries of the new playhouse.

The best part of theater is "the people that I work with – their personalities, dedication and contributions they make to the community." and DeBolt said he will miss the fun of performing in front of his friends.

One of his most memorable experiences on stage was during the production of "Deathtrap," when he turned from a "stuffed-shirt lawyer into a demented maniac who makes obscene phone calls."

As he reminisced about his days in the spotlight, he recalled one of his most demanding roles as the last man killed in "Ten Little Indians." Another highlight he shared was "being complimented on my imitation of FDR in 'Annie' because I was the only one old enough to remember how he sounded."

DeBolt still resides in Morgan Hill with his wife of 45 years, Carol. He has three grown sons. Although retired from IBM, he works part-time for Alliance Credit Union. In his spare time he teaches people at the Willow Senior Center how to use the Internet, surfs on his own computer and listens to old radio and movies from the 1940s and 1950s.

Despite the fun he has had on the stage and the number of roles he has played, DeBolt said he never took his acting career to seriously

"The only way I will get my name in lights is if I change it to 'Don't Walk,' " he joked.