

Entertainment Fantastic stage set plays a crucial role in SCVT's 'Willy Wonka' musical

Family-friendly play performances begin June 23

Published in the June 21 – July 4, 2017 of Morgan Hill Life

By Marty Cheek



Maya King, left, and Tegan Leong, work on the set for the upcoming shows of "Willy Wonka."
Photo by Marty Cheek

Maya King got herself stuck in a corner three times this month. Rolling violet-colored paint for the upcoming South Valley Civic Theatre show "Willy Wonka," the girl became so engaged in the set-building that she forgot to leave herself an exit path where she didn't have to step on a wet stage floor.

"I've learned not to paint myself into a corner," she said with a laugh. "I've done that a few times. I really like painting the floor."

She showed her sneakers. The spots of violet paint on the bottom serve as a lesson to choose her footwear more carefully next time she works on the set. A St. Mary School student going into seventh grade this fall, King plays the role of "Charlie Bucket" in the beloved classic story about five children who take a tour of a chocolate factory owned by a mischievous man.

"I play Charlie as sort of as a depressed, poor person, but at the same time he's positive," she said.

The stage set the SVCT volunteers are building plays an important role in telling the story, and King enjoys helping out with its construction.

“I like knowing that I contributed,” she said. “I also like coming here on the weekends because usually I don’t have anything to do. It’s cool to be at the theater. It’s fun painting.”

The set has several pieces that are favorites for King. The gumball machine that produces the sweets that turns Violet Beauregarde, a gum-chewing American girl, into a giant blueberry is one of them. And the colorfully designed Candy Man Cart where Charlie purchases the chocolate bar with a winning golden ticket to get him entry into the factory is another set piece that strikes her fancy.

The spectacle of the set — along with colorful lighting and theatrical effects — makes it a good show for families. The story’s message of perseverance and treating other people nicely is also inspiring, King said.

“It sort of shows kids to always think on the bright side and not be depressed because of how you are in life,” she said. “It’s not boring at all because it’s a very fast-paced show.”

Jason Leong worked with producer Robin Bezanson and Carol Harris in creating the ingenious “Willy Wonka” set.

“This has been an evolving design, as these things usually are, and that’s really cool because you can always get the best of what’s possible,” he said.

Giving a tour of the set, he showed off various components still being built. A canvas pulled over a frame will serve as boat for the children and their parents to be taken by Wonka on a wild ride down a chocolate river. A set piece being painted by Harris will serve as the backdrop for the various news interviews the five golden ticket-winning children give in the musical play.

“With each interview, you flip the stage and it’s another backdrop, as if they have moved to the next location,” he said. “It makes it easy for us to change scenes and not have to move a lot of things at once. It’s an efficient way to move the story along.”

Jason Harris plays the title role of Willy Wonka. The look of the set helps create the fairy tale-like world of the story, he said. There’s a contrast between the bleakness of Bucket’s shack with the color and motion of Willy Wonka factory. He sees the play as a morality tale with a comic twist, with Willy Wonka serving as a “puppet-master” manipulating the families who win the tour of his chocolate factory.

“Willy Wonka is not really a paragon of morality. It’s obviously a set-up, which is a bit persevere in itself. He’s invited five children to come to his factory. He knows from the start he’s going to eliminate four of them because they’re brats,” he said. “So why does he do it? Why does he go to all this trouble to victimize all the children? He’s sadistic.”

As producer, Bezanson encourages families to enjoy the play, especially if they want to introduce their children to the imaginative world of theater.

“It’s a very colorful and exciting show for kids. It’ll keep parents laughing because there are a lot of jokes that are funny for adults more so than children,” she said. “The fast pace of it will make it a very enjoyable show. And it has a good message. It’s a message of do right and be right and you’ll get rewards in the end. And Charlie gets a big reward at the end for being good and being honest.”

Like most actors and performers in our South Bay Area theater circles, Jason Harris started acting when he was in school. But unlike his peers, Jason's first performance was in a 5th grade production of "A Christmas Carol" put on at WirraBirra primary school in Perth, Western Australia in 1979.

"I played the ghost of Christmas Present," said Harris. "None of us could really project, so they pre-recorded us and we mimed it while we did the performance. This was easy in my case because I had a hood made from a sheet over my head. Nobody could see my face. All I had to do was walk about and gesture at Tiny Tim."

Other than that his earlier thespian performances mostly involved him dressing up in drag and singing John Denver songs for the family. Several of his relatives performed in one way or another so he feels that he had a natural genetic predisposition towards performing.

When Harris moved, by himself, to the US in the early '90s, he felt that he was not a very social person, but acting was one of things he liked doing that involved being with other people. So he started performing in theater because he liked it, and it provided a social outlet. Harris added, "That's a long winded way of saying I did it to meet women. Hey it worked! I met my wife in a show."

Over the years Harris has performed in approximately 23 different plays and has performed on the stages of San Jose City College, Stage One in Newark, Lyric Theater San Jose, San Benito Stage Company, Limelight Actors Theater and Pintello Comedy Theater in Gilroy, as well as South Valley Civic Theater in Morgan Hill.

Among his favorite roles he includes Fagin in "Oliver!" He enjoyed the role because as he described Fagin "He's not a nice person, but he's not mean. He's kind in his own self-serving way. The audience loves him, and is ultimately sympathetic towards his pathetic fate."

Another enjoyable role was as Applegate (A.K.A. the Devil) in "Damn Yankees." "It's the old old story of the Devil being beaten at his own game by a good man. It's Faust with baseball, and who doesn't dream of inflicting mass misery on the world?"

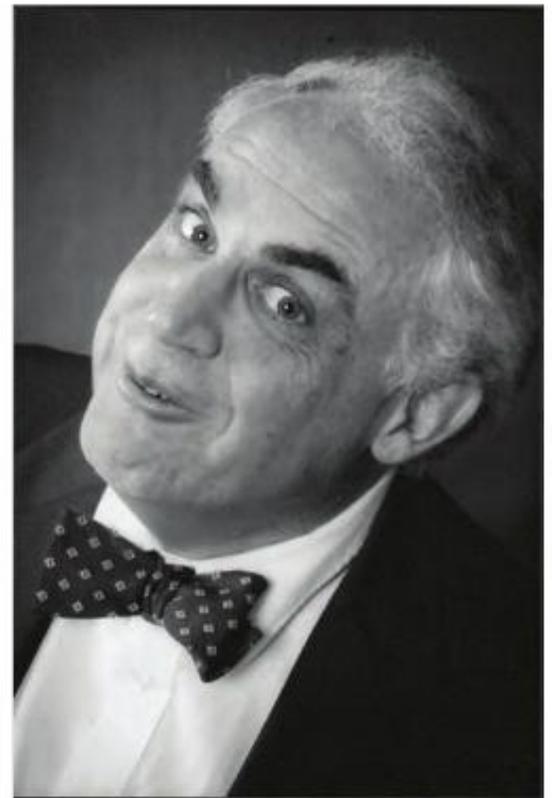
Recently at Limelight Actors Theater he played Saunders in "Lend Me a Tenor." "That man is an over-caffeinated manic depressive nut job. You can cry, scream and laugh manically in that role. It's very therapeutic."

I asked him what it was he liked best about being on stage in front of an audience. His reply was that they say runners run because their brains produce natural drugs and they have become addicted to them and that it could well be the same for actors — adrenalin produced from stage fright, followed by the warm endorphins released by a sympathetic audience response.

But it was this quote of his that sums it up quite nicely: "Stage performance offers a psychological catharsis, both for the actor and the audience. Done well, acting becomes its own unique flow of performance and transcends a mere set of actions. It's fun and satisfying when the people on stage manage to get that flow going. It's hard to understand, but there is obviously something to it. Why else would people dedicate so much unpaid spare time and run the risk of public embarrassment? Anyway, it's cheaper than therapy."

You can catch Jason, as well as his charming wife Robin, on stage as Willy Wonka in the upcoming production of "Willy Wonka" at South Valley Civic Theater in Morgan Hill which runs in June and July. Show times and tickets available at svct.org.

Jason Harris Putting the Wonka in Willy Wonka



Written By

MATTHEW RUSSELL HENDRICKSON



Matthew Russell Hendrickson has been involved with community theater for over 35 years. He is currently a designer's assistant for Brotin Design, a founding member of a local film production company, Oscar Dante Motion, and is still heavily involved with local theater.

South Valley Magazine

Chocolate with a twist

South Valley Civic Theater presents Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka

June 23, 2017 by [Susan Rife](#)



STAGE MAGIC Janelle Cummings painting lollipops for the chocolate smelting room in South Valley Civic Theater's production of Willy Wonka, opening June 23, 2017. Photo: Jason Leong

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And imagination is the key word for a show that lets the cast, production crew and audience members of any age let their creative imaginations run free.

"The whole idea of our set is very imaginative, and of course the music adds to that," said Carol Harris, who is directing the musical for South Valley Civic Theatre. At a rehearsal 10 days before the June 23 opening night, the cast was still in street clothes, the set was still under construction, and only lights dancing across the curtain and stage hinted at something magical in the works.

The story, based on Dahl's 1964 children's book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, follows young Charlie Bucket, who is among five winners of a tour of Willy Wonka's magnificent

chocolate factory. Earlier film and stage versions have starred Johnny Depp and Gene Wilder in the role of the chocolate magnate.

“We approached, in a way, of going off the book idea,” said producer Robin Bezanson. “Roald Dahl was an author; he traded in written words. One of our set pieces mimics the book in a lot of ways, more of a tribute to him.”

Trap doors, special effects and a huge painted backdrop to represent the chocolate factory are all part of the show’s imaginary verisimilitude, said Harris. Bubbles are painted on the backdrop using paint that shows only under black light.

“It’s all very colorful and imaginative,” she said.

Bezanson said it was limitations only of the space itself, time and money that curtailed her creative team.

“Our brainstorming sessions for our production team were always, ‘we could do this, we could do that,’” she said. “When you get a show with so many options and color, it’s so off the wall that anything goes.”

Bezanson said she wanted the production to focus on the humor of the original story. “We wanted it to be an endearing, loving kind of Wonka.”

SVCT found that in Jason Harris, who stars at Wonka opposite 11-year-old Maya King as Charlie.

“He’s pulled it off really well,” said Bezanson. “He takes a scene and puts a twist of his own on it. He has a knack of doing that.”

“There’s a lot of humor in the show that adults will relate to,” she said. “We’ve seen the show thousands of times, it seems like, and it’s still funny. That’s a good sign if your production team is still laughing during rehearsals.”

The show’s run includes a July 15 matinee that is “sensory/young child friendly.”

‘Roald Dahl’s Willy Wonka’ June 23-July 15 at South Valley Civic Theatre, 17090 Monterey

Fantastic stage set plays a crucial role in SCVT's 'Willy Wonka' musical

Musical fantasy is excellent way to introduce children to the theater arts

Published in the July 5 – July 18, 2017 issue of Morgan Hill Life

By Camille Bounds | Photos by Marty Cheek



Maya King, as Charlie Bucket, and Jason Harris, as Willy Wonka, perform in South Valley Civic Theatre's production of the family musical play "Willy Wonka."

Carol Harris directs this South Valley Civic Theatre show — the last of the 2016-2017 season— with a silky wand that brings out the best in the 40 or more kids who hit the stage on cue and sing and dance their hearts out. The performance comes together beautifully with her on-spot organization and super direction.

"It is a great family musical that includes all ages and appeals to all ages. We enjoy presenting classic stories for the whole family," said Robin Bezanson, the show's producer. "I'm bursting at the seams with a pride in this production. The professionalism of each actor from our very youngest to the oldest has been top notch. They have crafted their characters and made them their own. Their enthusiasm is infectious.

When you present a quality set and actors who make the story come to life like they have, the product is something to be proud of.”



and hilarity

Jen Puente, as Mrs. Bucket, Maya King, as Charlie Bucket, and Joe Hartman, as Mr. Bucket, share a tender moment in the SVCT musical “Willy Wonka.”

This “Willy Wonka” is a tribute to the level of talent both on stage and behind the scenes that we have in the South Valley, with performers coming from Gilroy, Morgan Hill and elsewhere in the region.

Maya King plays the story’s hero, Charlie Bucket. Jason Harris is the mischievous title character Willy Wonka, the eccentric owner of a most unusual confectionery manufacturing enterprise made famous in Roald Dahl’s popular children’s book, “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.”

The two performers have the most songs and they both carry their tunes throughout the show with feeling and earnestness. The rest of actors are well cast and skillfully deliver their moments of music

More than 20 songs with music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley are a part of this fast-moving musical — including the favorites “The Candy Man” and “Pure Imagination” that are noted as standards today.

Augustus Gloop is played by Josh Watts as a bratwurst-loving, over-stuffed child encouraged along by the words of his wonderfully stereotypically German mother, played by Megan Griffin. Veruca Salt, the British spoiled brat, is played by Leah Grifall, and the popular Chris Goller is her submissive father.

Sean O’Connor plays Mike Teavee, an electronics obsessed kid whose mother, played by Trish King, dotes on his over assertiveness of his needs for high-tech gadgets. Jillian Puente



plays Violet Beauregarde, the Southern girl who has an obnoxious gum addiction encouraged along by her mother, played by Elizabeth K. Wagner.

The cast of kids find the five golden tickets hidden within their candy bars that get them through the gates for a hilarious tour of Willy Wonka's mysterious chocolate factory. All fail Wonka's secret tests of who shall inherit his business. But Charlie's politeness and honesty wins out in the end.

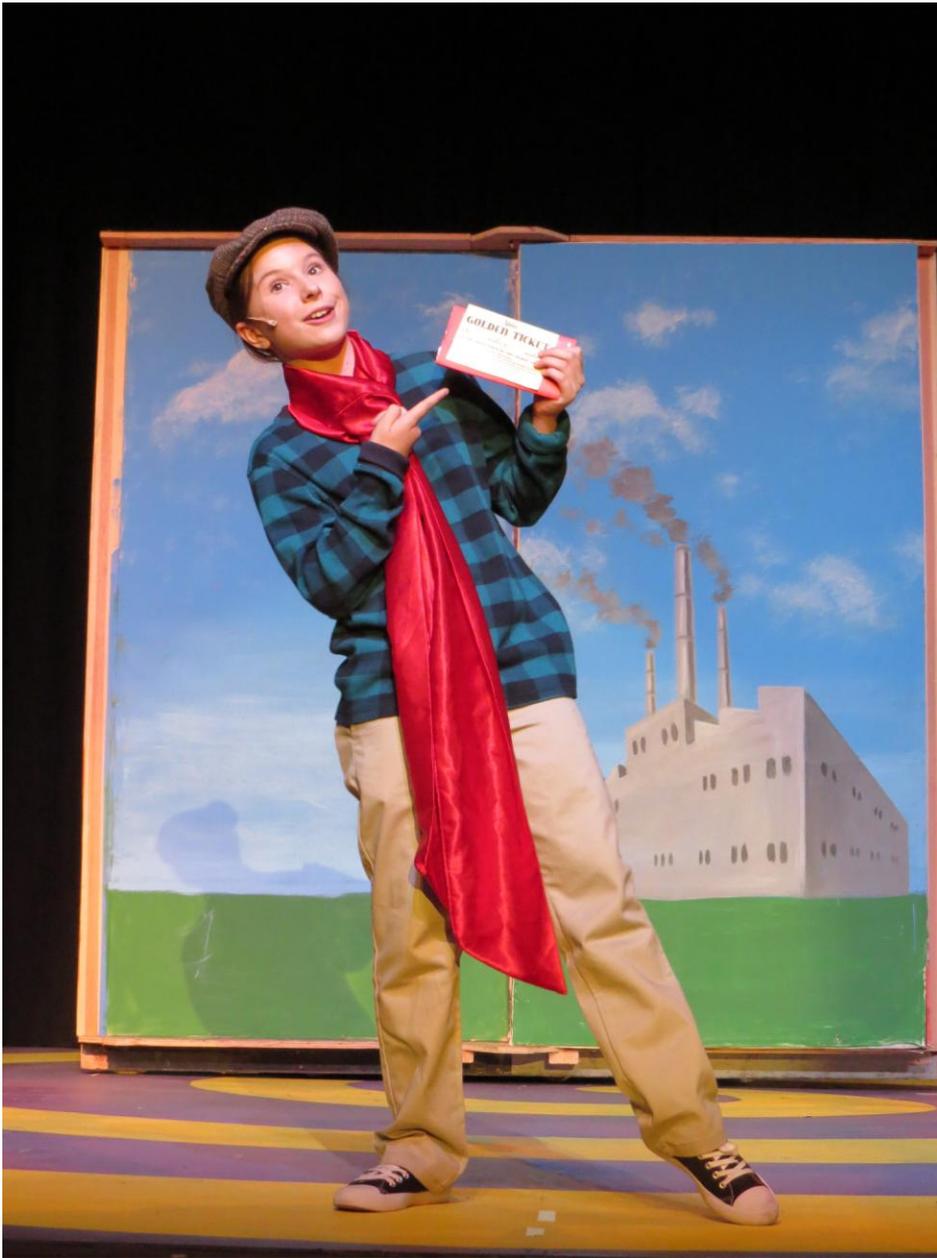
Adding to the adventure are the Oompa Loompas and nutty squirrels performed by loads of kids covering the stage. All are in bright, delightful costumes designed by Michelle Griffin, with great hair and makeup by Tiffany Goller. The stage sets are a wonderment that seems everyone had a part in the building and designing led by Robin Bezanson, Carol Harris and Jason Leong.



Adding to the effects are the super sound by Sierra McKenna and Kris Snook and lightning by Joyce Bedard.

The stage crew that moves and change scenes, dressers, music technicians and a ton of others make up this huge cast in front and back stage— you have to know — the show goes nowhere without these behind-the-scenes people.

The “Willy Wonka” set is comprised of uniquely designed pieces that are multi-functional. One piece acts as a book to switch from scene to scene. As for special effects, this show has a lot more elements than SVCT’s shows have had in the past.



“Our amazing lighting designer, Joyce Bedard, has incorporated lighting effects like strobe lights, UV black lights, laser lights and unique techniques,” Bezanson said. “In addition to that we are using scents to enhance the audience’s experience and even a shower of bubbles.”

The choreography by Jyovonne Montosa is simple, delightful and well rehearsed. Getting little children to concentrate and work together isn’t easy but they deliver great groups of numbers in unison. They are really fun to watch and the plot is fast moving and complicated, but it will keep you alert throughout the entire production.

Willy Wonka will make you smile and leave you with a warm, good feeling.

This SVCT production for children of all ages is more than worth the price of your golden ticket.

<http://morganhilllife.com/fantastic-stage-set-plays-crucial-role-scvts-willy-wonka-musical/>

South Valley

South Valley Magazine | SouthValley.com

Wild Willy Wonka

South Valley Civic Theatre's sweet treat

July 6, 2017 by Susan Rife



Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka* is now playing at Morgan Hill South Valley Civic Theatre through July 15. Newsman Phineous Trout (Zack Goller) interviews Augustus Gloop (Josh Watts) and his mom upon winning the golden ticket. Photo: Chad King

Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka is just the sort of light trifle that will amuse adults and children alike on a hot summer evening—as refreshing as an ice cream cone.

Directed by Carol Harris with choreography by Jyovonne Montosa at Morgan Hill's South Valley Civic Theatre, the show, adapted from Dahl's 1964 children's book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and the 1971 movie musical, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, is the story of Charlie Bucket, the young son of a laid-off factory worker, who is one of five children who wins a tour of Willy Wonka's fabulous chocolate factory. The other four winners are all horrid brats, but Charlie ultimately prevails, as is only right.

The key adults in the musical are Jason Harris as Wonka, the eccentric chocolatier who has no one to inherit his wondrous factory; Zack Goller as newsman Phineous Trout and Chris Bezanson as the Candy Man. All turn in well-grounded performances, especially Harris, whose voice is ideally suited to such tunes as “Pure Imagination” and “Golden Age of Chocolate.”

Harris, resplendent in a purple velvet frock coat with multicolored satin vest and the ever-present top hat, displays a clear affection for Charlie and ultimately the whole Bucket family.

Maya King as Charlie has the heaviest lifting throughout the show, with such songs as “Think Positive” (opposite Joe Hartman as Mr. Bucket), and “Flying” and “The Burping Song,” opposite Chris Souza as Grandpa Joe. On opening night, some pitch challenges were resolved as the show developed; King, who is just 11 years old, has a guileless stage presence and demonstrates a relaxed and comfortable ability as an actor, singer and dancer.

The four other kids on the factory tour make the most of their various roles as brats, from Josh Watts as the greedy guts Augustus Gloop, Leah Grifall as the demanding South American Veruca Salt, Jillian Puente as the insufferable gum-smacking Violet Beauregarde and Sean O’Connor as the TV addict Mike Teavee. Each gets his or her comeuppance on the factory tour, with the Oompa Loompas, the tribe of factory workers who serve as the moral compass of the show.

Set design by Robin Bezanson, Carol Harris and Jason Leong is a wonder of wild imagination, with Wonka’s factory filled with pixie sticks and lollipops galore. The Bucket home, barely a shack, stands in stark contrast, with all four of Charlie’s grandparents crammed into a single bed.

Costumer Michelle Griffin, assisted by Terri Miles, has done fine work, from Wonka’s stylish velvet coat to the Oompa Loompas’ Hershey Kiss-style caps.

‘Roald Dahl’s Willy Wonka.’ Based on the book, ‘Charlie and the Chocolate Factory’ by Roald Dahl. Music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley. Through July 15 at South Valley Civic Theatre, Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, Fifth and Monterey Streets, Morgan Hill. Tickets \$25 general, \$20 seniors, \$16 students. 408.842.SHOW; SVCT.org.

<http://southvalley.com/willy-wonka-review-svct/>

Chocolate with a twist

By Nate Mixer, June 23, 2017

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