

## A Christmas Story” is a delightful visit to a gentler time

Show about young boy’s hilarious holidays on stage at Morgan Hill Playhouse until Dec. 10

<https://gilroylife.com/2022/11/24/review-christmas-story/>



Photo courtesy Chris Foster/SVCT

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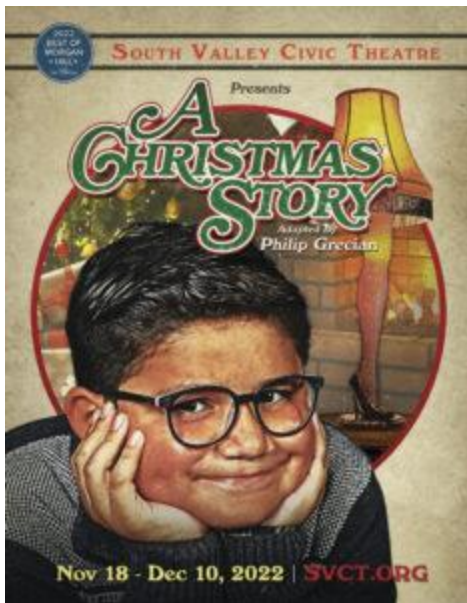
By Camille Bounds

There is “The Nutcracker,” “A Christmas Carol,” “It’s a Wonderful Life,” and “How The Grinch Stole Christmas” as our traditional Christmas theatre toddlers. You can well add “A Christmas Story” if you haven’t already.

This delightfully charming story was originally written as a 1983 film by Jean Shepherd and tenderly transferred to a stage play by Phillip Grecian. It brings a charming delight to children and warm nostalgic thoughts to adults.

The South Valley Civic Theatre's solid, strong cast of a few seasoned adults and an abundance of well-directed talented children bring in "A Christmas Story" with joy and memories of a gentler time sometime in the thirties and forties. (Your choice.)

The meticulous direction of Allie Bailey draws the best from the actors and produces a charming, amusing experience. There is a definite art to directing children and Bailey has the touch.



Jery Rosas is fantastic as the grown up Ralph Parker who dreams back to his childhood and obsessively dreams of finding an air rifle left by Santa under the Christmas tree. He carries the narrative and is the glue that keeps the story together by stepping into just about every scene and keeping the wild plot as sane as it can get.

Matthew Horta as Ralphie Parker, the nine year old that obsesses over a Red Ryder 200 – Shot Carbine Action Air Rifle BB gun, carries his role with genuine confidence and creditability.

Keith Larson as "the Old Man," Shawna Gonzales as Ralphie's mom, and Marilyn Pifer as "Ms. Shields" carry their roles in "A Christmas Story" with an almost believability and the giddiness of the times.

As usual the SVCT's creative team brings in a show that is gorgeous to the eyes and ears. The play is produced by Ingrid Rottman and Michael

Horta. Joseph Ramirez is the stage manager, Dana Scribner is the Lead Stage Deck Manager, Kimberly Lynch is costume designer, Mykal Philbin is lighting designer, Brian Bourke is sound designer, and Lori Foster is the props designer.

"A Christmas Story" is wholesome, pleasant and perhaps a little corny moment in time that should be seen and savored. Cynics might even get a little warm twinge in their heart and God knows a warm twinge might be just the thing we need in these uncertain times.



Shawna Gonzales as Mother (clockwise, from top left), Keith Larson as The Old Man, Matthew Horta as Ralphie Parker and Jase Puente as Randy star in South Valley Civic Theatre's holiday play, "A Christmas Story." Photo: Chris Foster

## Love and stress during the holidays

South Valley Civic Theatre's 'A Christmas Story' opens Nov. 18

<https://morganhilltimes.com/love-and-stress-during-the-holidays/>

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#), November 14, 2022

To call Keith Larson a superfan of "A Christmas Story" might be an understatement.

The San Jose native still remembers that clear winter day as a 9-year-old in 1983, when the power tripped off in his neighborhood without a known reason.

On a whim, the family decided to hit the movie theater, where their options were “A Christmas Story” or an action flick whose name has been lost to time.

They chose Bob Clark’s comedic holiday romp, not knowing at the time that it would have such a powerful impact on pop culture. It turned out to be a good decision, to say the least.

“We said, ‘let’s give this show a shot,’” Larson recalled. “We were howling through the entire film. It’s become a staple in my family.”

Since then, Larson and his family have watched “A Christmas Story” annually, some years even more than once. When his son in 2019 had the opportunity to travel to Cleveland, Ohio as part of a baseball team, Larson said there were two stops they had to make: the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and the home where “A Christmas Story” was filmed.

When Larson had the opportunity to audition as The Old Man in South Valley Civic Theatre’s upcoming performance of “A Christmas Story,” he was able to check off an accomplishment on his bucket list when he was chosen to play the iconic role.

“A Christmas Story” opens Nov. 18 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. Showtimes are 8pm Fridays and Saturdays through Dec. 10, with 2pm performances on Nov. 27 and Dec. 4.

The movie, and later the play, is based off of humorist Jean Shepherd’s memoir of childhood in the 1940s, following 9-year-old Ralphie Parker who dreams of getting a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas.

Allie Bailey has recently found herself the go-to director for Christmas shows, including directing holiday performances in back-to-back years for Los Altos Stage Company, as well as 2021’s [“A Nice Family Christmas” for Limelight by South Valley Civic Theatre](#).

“I really love Christmas,” she said. “There’s a feeling in the air this time of the year that makes me happy, excited and spurs creativity.”

Bailey said her approach with “A Christmas Story” was to showcase things that diehard fans have come to expect, such as a 1940s setting, the BB gun, the bunny suit, and of course, Ralphie’s glasses.

But at the same time, she added some nuances that are unique for SVCT’s performance, such as increasing the cast from 11 to 15, while adding an actual Santa Claus character as opposed to just his voice. Santa, meanwhile, will be greeting guests in the lobby.

The cast has been rehearsing since early October, building their chemistry to make their familial bonds seem believable while they are on stage. Bailey said the cast consists of five adults and 10 children, ages 10-17.

“Trying to bring together all those different life experiences to create a cohesive theater family has been a rewarding challenge,” she said. “They’re really putting in so much detail, so much character work, that it lifts the story off the page.”

Bailey added that Matthew Horta shines in his role as Ralphie.



"You can't not watch him," she said.

Larson said he had always viewed "A Christmas Story" through the lens of the children. But now as a father of two, he completely relates with his character, who was portrayed by actor Darren McGavin in the original film.

"Not only did I love what he did before, I have a whole new appreciation for how brilliant his performance was," he said. "Now I see the behaviors of Ralphie and Randy in my boys. It's hysterical. When you watch the movie and see Darren looking exasperated, I know that look. I know that desire for peace and quiet."

Larson noted that "A Christmas Story" is more than just a distraction from everyday life.

"It's a reminder that the world is an imperfect place, and that's OK," he said. "Yes, it's about the stress of the holidays, but this story is really about familial love. It's wonderful."

"A Christmas Story" runs Nov. 18-Dec. 10 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. For information and tickets, visit [svct.org/2022\\_christmas](https://svct.org/2022_christmas).

## SVCT's 'A Christmas Story' is a warm-hearted childhood comedy

The show about a boy and his family opens Nov. 18 at Morgan Hill Community Playhouse

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From top left: Shawna Gonzales as "Mother," Keith Larson as "The Old Man." From bottom left: Jase Puente as "Randy," and Matthew Horta as "Ralphie Parker" in South Valley Civic Theatre's holiday play "A Christmas Story."

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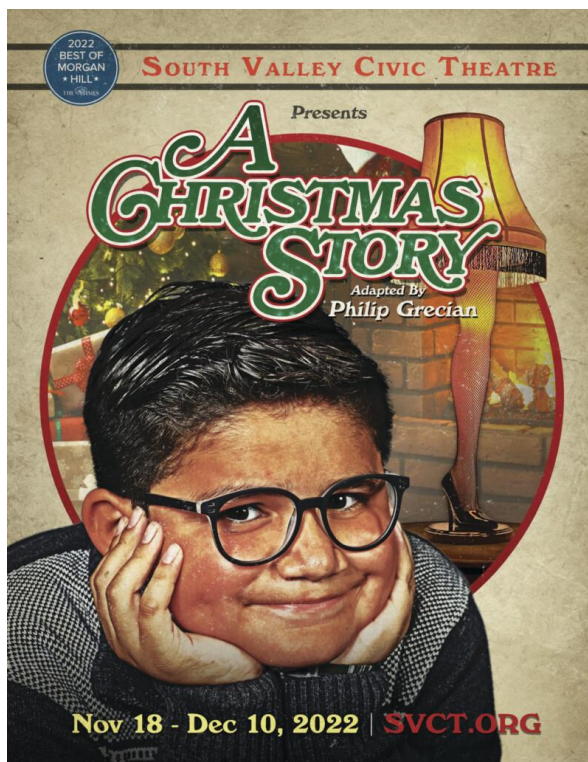
By Marty Cheek

The narrative of a boy's hilarious holiday misadventures in a nostalgic small town America will be told on stage in South Valley Civic Theatre's production of the comical play "A Christmas Story."

Based on the beloved 1983 film, the play is presented in a series of warm vignettes told by an adult narrator looking back at childhood innocence. It stars 10-year-old Matthew Horta as "Ralphie Parker," a child in the fictional town of Hammond, Ind., who wants only one thing from Santa Claus: a Red Ryder Carbine Action 200-shot Range Model air rifle. Ralphie's wish is rejected by his mother, his teacher Miss Shields, and even a mean department store Santa, all warning him: "You'll shoot your eye out."

A fifth grader at El Roble Elementary School in Gilroy, Horta is "really excited" and also a bit nervous for opening night as he polishes up his role as the dorky Ralphie.

"It's the main role of the show and there's a lot of pressure," he said. "It's a funny and classic (show)."



Shawna Gonzales plays Ralphie's mother, trying to keep the Parker household in balance with two sons and a father obsessed with winning the "major award" in a crossword puzzle contest: a table lamp in the shape of a woman's leg wearing a fishnet stocking.

"'Mom' has to keep herself together for the good of the family," she said. "I am a mom, I have two little girls, 12 and eight — and so I can relate a lot of what the mom is going through."

The show provides a warm message to the audience that no family is perfect, every family has a bit of crazy to it, and despite the madness, it's not presents but the spirit of love that makes a special Christmas, she said.

"There's a great speech at the end of the play," she said. "'Even if your turkey gets eaten by the dogs, and you have to go out to a Chinese restaurant, it really doesn't matter at the end

because you're spending time with your family and you all love each other even if things are going haywire.'"

As the father — affectionately called "The Old Man" — Keith Larson considers "A Christmas Story" a classic family holiday play. He recalls first seeing the movie version as a young child about "Ralphie's" age when the electricity went out in his neighborhood and his dad took the family to the cinema.

He enjoys the story because it cuts through the fantasy of a perfect Christmas and shows the human side of the characters.

"Everyone has this Norman Rockwell version about what Christmas should be," Larson said. "And in (the play) everything goes wrong — and it could not have made the holiday any better . . . As much as time and generations have changed and evolved, I still look at this story as completely timeless. My kids love it because

they see their Christmases and they see the relationship they have with their mother and the pratfalls. I don't know if we're really that different as the people in the world that's portrayed in 'A Christmas Story.'"

The show's director Allie Bailey said the cast and crew have formed a close family that makes the performances stand out. The audience will feel transported to a "simpler" time in a small community where people still might have had problems but they muddled through them because they cared about each other.

"It gets you in a Christmas mood even before Thanksgiving," she said. "Christmas for me is about family. This is a very family friendly show people can identify with — whether they're young or old. There's a lot of comedy in this show so it's a great night out."