

Curtains Up Theater Review . . . by Camille Bounds: SVCT's 'Drowsy Chaperone' is a laugh a minute

The show takes you back to 1928 to the early days of the Broadway musical

<https://morganhilllife.com/2023/02/26/review-drowsy-chaperone-2/>



Photo courtesy Tim Ahlin

From left to right: Jason Eves (Adolpho), Peter Mandel (Man in Chair), Ken Christopher (Robert Martin), Riley Brown (Kitty), Nicole King-Yarbrough (Janet Van de Graff), and Ingrid Rottman (The Drowsy Chaperone).

Published February 26, 2023 on MorganHillLife.com

By Camille Bounds

Watching "The Drowsy Chaperon" at its Feb. 24 opening night, I wondered where all this exceptional talent and energy comes from in the South Valley Civic Theatre performers. This is entertainment!

First of all, an 11-piece orchestra is the real star of the show. Under the sure baton of music director Alan Chipman, who is conducting his 25th SVCT show, the musicians came in with a full fine score of this complicated, always-on-the-move story.

Scene stealers comes with the endearing and charming Peter Mandel as "The Man in the Chair." He is on stage for the entire performance, leading the audience through each scene with such lovable ambiance you at times want to hug him. Understudy Verose Deslonde as "Janet Van de Graff" went on with an afternoon notice that the lead actress could not make the performance. She delivered a solid first class performance with a great voice and delivery.

The show takes you back to 1928 to the early days of the Broadway musical, a time when producers could put their girlfriends in the show and gangsters were financial backers. It's a mad romp. Song and dance production numbers, arranged by choreographer Christine Carrillo, are done at the drop of a hat without regard for any obvious or non-obvious reason. The old "boy gets girl, boy loses girl and boy gets girl back" plot is in full swing with an over-the-top fantastic corny finale to end all over-the-top corny finales.



Shout outs to Jenn Oliphant for her creative sets and Clara Shen-Tov for the enticing stage lighting. They turn a dingy apartment into upper estate scenes right before your eyes. And a kitchen "refrigerator" magically allows actors to make a grand entrance on the stage.

The cast was energetic and everyone delivers a great performance. Ken Christopher as the blind folded roller-skating bridegroom (sometime in tap shoes!) does a super job. Ingrid Rottman's boozy chaperone keep the humor going. The rest of the cast gave

their all in delightful costumes by Michelle Griffin. Director Alan Chipman kept the production moving at a fast pace and had everyone on stage having such a good time.

As I always say, "It's not what you do, it's how you do it." And "The Drowsy Chaperone" really does it well. If you want to get away from it all one weekend evening this month, and you have to think about going easy on the gas, stay local and go to the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse and enjoy this hilarious show.

South Valley Civic Theatre brings ‘Drowsy Chaperone’ to local stage

<https://morganhilltimes.com/south-valley-civic-theatre-brings-drowsy-chaperone-local-stage/>



South Valley Civic Theatre’s “The Drowsy Chaperone” cast includes, from left: Jason Eves (Adolpho), Peter Mandel (Man in Chair), Ken Christopher (Robert Martin), Riley Brown (Kitty), Nicole King-Yarbrough (Janet Van de Graff) and Ingrid Rottman (The Drowsy Chaperone). The musical opens Feb. 24 in Morgan Hill. Photo: Tim Ahlin

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#)
February 16, 2023

“The Drowsy Chaperone” may not have the name recognition of the big-time Broadway musicals, but its five Tony Awards are nothing to scoff at.

After debuting in Toronto in 1998, “The Drowsy Chaperone” made its way to Broadway in 2006, with New York Magazine calling it the “perfect Broadway musical,” and other critics hailing it as the best musical no one has ever heard of.

And Nicole King-Yarbrough, who performs as Janet Van de Graff in South Valley Civic Theatre’s upcoming performance of the musical, says that many people she knows who saw “The Drowsy Chaperone” for the first time left the theater convinced it was their new favorite show.

SVCT will bring the musical to the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road, Fridays through Sundays from Feb. 24 to March 18.

“It’s definitely a show a lot of people aren’t familiar with,” said Malisha Kumar, who co-produces the musical with Ken Christopher and Ingrid Rottman. “It deserves a chance to be seen.”

“The Drowsy Chaperone” earned “Best Book” and “Best Original Score,” among its Tony Awards.

The musical opens with a man in a chair, who puts on a record to cheer himself up. In this instance, he plays “The Drowsy Chaperone,” and his apartment is transformed into a Roaring ‘20s jazz musical.

What follows next and throughout the musical’s runtime is a “comedy of errors,” Christopher said, featuring two lovers about to get married, an intoxicated chaperone, two gangsters going undercover as pastry chefs, and a full cast of goofy characters.

“In a world where things are far too serious sometimes, it’s good to go to the theater and see a show that doesn’t have the gravitas of a Broadway show, but it has a lot of innocent fun,” said Christopher, who also performs as Robert Martin. “You’re going to start laughing at the first note and all the way to the end note. That’s the medicine we need.”

Kumar said the cast of 20 also features a contingent of teenage actors, many of them veterans of the SVCT stage. In fact, they have flipped the script and have been teaching many of the adults the ropes of being on stage for the first time.

“It’s been fun to see the kids interacting with the adults, and the adults interacting with the kids,” she said.

Christopher and King-Yarbrough have once again been cast as the romantic leads, after playing in the lead roles in [SVCT’s “Beauty and the Beast” last summer.](#)

King-Yarbrough said the on-stage couple’s interactions, and arguments, with each other are presented in a way that is relatable to the audience, with Christopher adding that the actors’ previous repertoire have helped add to the believability.

“It’s definitely been fun diving into the show and seeing it come to life,” King-Yarbrough said. “Everybody’s character is so believable, and each and every one is funny. You are just laughing the entire time.”

South Valley Civic Theatre’s “The Drowsy Chaperone” opens Feb. 24 and runs Fridays through Sundays to March 18. For information and tickets, visit svct.org/2023_drowsy.

Entertainment: South Valley Civic Theatre's 'The Drowsy Chaperone' is a fun, rollicking ride

Show features an ensemble cast of 20 local performers

<https://morganhilllife.com/2023/02/11/svct-drowsy-chaperone/>

Published February 22-March 7, 2023 issue of Morgan Hill Life



Photo courtesy Tim Ahlin

From left to right: Jason Eves (Adolpho), Peter Mandel (Man in Chair), Ken Christopher (Robert Martin), Riley Brown (Kitty), Nicole King-Yarbrough (Janet Van de Graff), and Ingrid Rottman (The Drowsy Chaperone).

By Calvin Nuttall

It seems like an unusual premise for a hit Broadway musical: All alone in an apartment, a man sits in a comfortable armchair, remaining seated throughout the show. He does not interact with any other characters who appear on stage. He speaks only to the audience as an old-fashioned screwball story unfolds around him.

This is the setup for South Valley Civic Theatre's "The Drowsy Chaperone," opening Feb 24. The show features an ensemble cast of 20 actors performing Vaudeville-style dance numbers and doing "madcap hijinks."

The play is a loving send-up of the Jazz Age musical, telling the romantic comedy story of a fictitious 1928 musical. It mixes the antics of two lovers on the eve of their wedding, a bumbling best man, a desperate theater producer, a not-so-bright hostess, two gangsters posing as pastry chefs, a misguided Don Juan and an intoxicated chaperone for an evening of madcap delight, according to SVCT's website.

Peter Mandel plays the central role of the unnamed narrator.

"All of this pizzazz is actually in the mind of the man in the chair," he said. "So, all of this is somewhat imaginary. The man in the chair is the only 'real' person in the show, who talks to the audience, explaining the story. As he speaks, the show is being performed."

The man in the chair is a lonely gentleman who turns to his parents' old records for a pick-me-up when he is feeling blue. Of those, his favorite is a cast recording of "The Drowsy Chaperone." Mandel plays the record and narrates the story for the audience.

The narrator consistently breaks the fourth wall and engages the audience, he said. As the musical is set in a bygone era, not everything will translate easily for a modern audience. The narrator's job is to help the audience understand what was and was not appropriate for the time, so they can better appreciate the drama.



"He loves this show," Mandel said of the man in the chair. "He explains the backgrounds of the actors and everything he has learned about this show over the years because he has researched it. He'll talk about the biographies of the performers onstage, the plot, the background, and things like that." The role of the narrator is uniquely challenging because, due to the premise of the show, he does not speak directly with any of the other characters, Mandel said.

"There's nobody else on stage with me. The rest of them don't really

exist,” he said. “They’re all in my imagination. When you’re learning lines, having dialogue makes it simpler because you’re responding to someone, which makes it easier to remember what the next line would be. There’s no dialogue, it’s dozens of monologues instead. It’s fun to perform, though.”

Even though the show is set in the 1920s, through magic of stagecraft the story all happens in the narrator’s apartment, said Ken Christopher, who plays “Robert Martin,” a lead character of the musical within the musical.

“It’s rip-roaring fun,” he said.

Christopher, who played the role of “Beast” in SVCT’s recent production of “Beauty and the Beast,” is again joined by Nicole King-Yarbrough (who played “Beauty”) as the leading lady, this time in the role of “Janet Van de Graff.”

“Janet is a total diva,” King-Yarbrough said. “She loves the spotlight, but she is ready to risk it all and give it all away to marry a man she just met. Her manager, ‘Feldzieg,’ is dying to keep her on the stage. She really wants to know if Robert is the man for her. So she goes to extremes to figure out if he is.”

“The Drowsy Chaperone” is a fun, rollicking ride, Christopher said.

“It has corny humor and a certain levity to it I think a lot of us could use now,” he said. “It’s a show you’re going to enjoy. It’s not overly complicated. It’s just a really fun time.”