

Dispatch photos by Doug Parker

Amy Allen and Helen Huang sing a duet, left, while Kevin Fallis and Cindy Davis rehearse their number.

Children learn more than roles

By Bonnie Lemons
Dispatch Lifestyles Editor

If you go see *Cinderella* at the Gilroy High School Theater tonight, you'll see a performance by actors who, incidentally, happen to be kids.

At least that's how they see it.

Since auditions began June 12, the 6 to 16-year-old cast has been prodded and yelled at and forced to accept far more responsibility than many had ever had before.

Gilroy Community Theatre (GCT) Director George Costa, who brought the San Jose Civic Light Opera to its present prominence, "demands as much as you can give," said Kevin Fallis, who plays the king in the Apple Cast.

The group is divided into two casts, and will switch off doing performances this weekend and next. Apple Company, the older cast, performs Saturday at 2 p.m. this weekend and Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. next weekend. Orange Company, the younger cast, performs at 8 p.m.

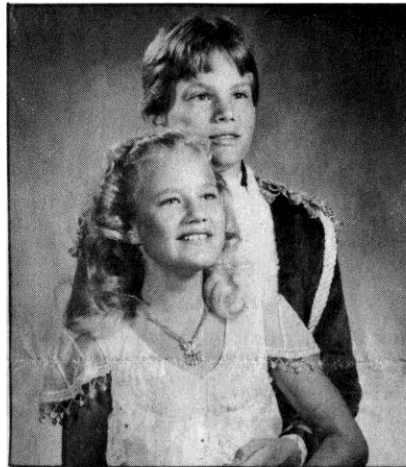


Photo special to The Dispatch

Friday and Saturday this weekend, and at the 2 p.m. matinee next Saturday. Cost is \$2.50 for children, \$3.50 for adults.

The kids call Costa "George," but they have plenty of respect. "He tells us to keep on trying to get better until we're out of luck," said Jeff Nelson, son of *Cinderella* music director Richard Nelson and veteran of a dozen plays with Costa.

"He yells at you if you're late, but most of the time it's not anger," said Cindy Howell, the 13-year-old *Cinderella* in the Apple Company.

"He's not yelling at you, he's yelling to you," explained Amy Allen, who plays one of *Cinderella*'s step-sisters. "We don't really take it personally."

The kids have rehearsed from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. every day for the past two weeks. One afternoon, *Cinderella* Erica Rizzi and Prince Simon Pintello were practicing an interlude outside the dance, just before the magic hour of midnight. Erica was supposed to be pacing nervously, but it wasn't quite working.

"If you don't quit walking like a truck driver, you're going to be one," Costa said.

When a satellite conversation began in the back of the room, Costa stopped it immediately. "Lewis, would you like to give this lecture? Then shut up."

"It's like tough love," said Polly Gariaeff, who has two children in the play. "But underneath the gruffness, he's really very gentle, and the kids sense that."

Rod Pintello, who worked with Costa in *Hello Dolly*, agrees. "He's working miracles with these kids in a very short period of time," he said. His son, Simon, plays the prince in the Apple Company.

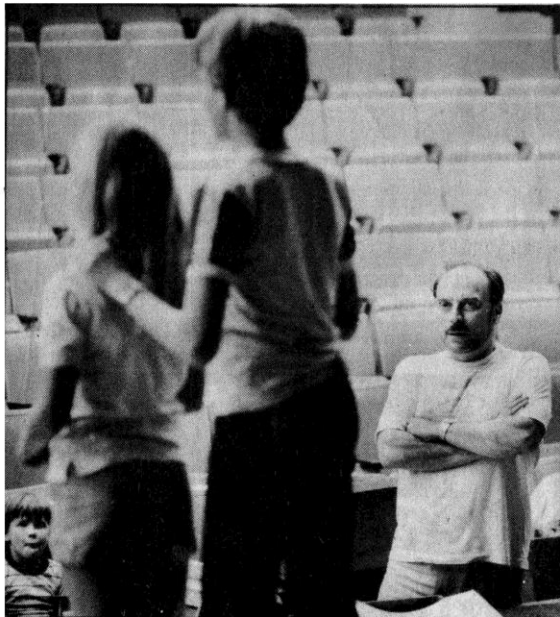
"The kids love to be here (at rehearsal) and they hate to leave," Pintello added.

"It's fun, but you still have to work at it," said Richard McCue, who plays the king.

This is their first involvement in theater for several of the youngsters. Gariaeff says their growth has been spectacular. Her 6-year-old has always been shy, "but this has really brought her out," she said. "I've seen a lot of kids blossom."

This is the third summer GCT has had a children's play, and this is Costa's first time to direct.

"A lot of these children have never made a commitment like this before," said Gariaeff. "My children were never this responsible before. But now they watch over their scripts and costumes, they have respect for their elders and they've learned to be prompt."



Top, Cindy Howell and Charles Gilmore in costume. Above, rehearsals can be tiring. George Costa keeps a watchful eye on his cast, left.

Dazzling kids perform with confident maturity

If you enjoy children or have children who would like to do something new as summer winds down, go to the Gilroy Childrens' Theatre production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, finishing off a two-weekend run with performances Friday and Saturday evening and Saturday afternoon at the Gilroy High School Theatre.

The Gilroy Community Theatre-sponsored event is a delight on a very simple level — it has lots of color; an amazing attention to detail; beautiful costumes; crisp, clean, bright sets; and a group of dazzling kids.

Director George Costa has worked wonders with his young charges. If this is the future of theater in Gilroy, then the future is worth waiting for.

There are two casts, and I watched the B Company perform on opening night. It is the younger crew, running from age 6 to 11-12. The older, A Company, up to age 16, will perform both evening shows this weekend, with B back for the matinee. I did not have the opportunity to see the "varsity" in action, but if the JVs were any indication, it should be a good show.

Much of the performance is carried throughout the discipline that Costa has instilled in his cast. The players know their lines, they know where they're supposed to be, they know the emotions behind the lines. Sometimes there are mishaps and sometimes there is a mistake, but they are confident enough group of youngsters to pick up the pieces immediately and go right on, a sign of maturity that belies their ages. They had to play over an audience of proud parents and grandparents with flash cameras and crying younger brothers and sisters. They did it with aplomb.

Backing the cast is the care with which the production has been put together. GCT does that 90 percent of the time with its adult productions and there was no shirking on *Cinderella*. The costumes and sets, both designed by Costa, were outstanding in their thoughtful construction. A prettier sight you will rarely see than a group of young girls dressed for a ball — they absolutely glow. Their escorts, very manly and proper, can't let on that they look marvelous in tails and jodhpurs and high black boots, but the effect brought a smile to my face.

A charmer played Cinderella. Erica Rizzi, black-haired and dimpled, was a joy to watch as scullery maid and princess. She moves with grace and assurance and has a strong voice. Her prince, Simon Pintello, is carried by a very nice voice. There is a certain awkwardness between them that is attractive.

The juicy roles of the two nasty step-sisters, written for comedy by Rodgers and Hammerstein,

Joanne Rife



were well done by Diana Isenberg-Warren and Sonia Gariaeff. Diana, in particular, as the leading nasty, Portia, wearing a fright-wig, was hilarious and at times ran away with the show. Sonia, as Joy, a follow-the-leader nasty, was appropriately wimpy.

Three older girls played the "grown-up" roles of the stepmother (Dawn Logan), the godmother (Janie McIntosh) and the queen (Jennifer Nunes), and all were very good. Jennifer was most convincing as the queen, a combination of hautiness and arrogance, and Janie has the best voice as a oddly conceived godmother, half magic and half neighbor-next-door.

Richard McCue played the king as one of those monarchs who trails around in the queen's shadow, making decisions already made by the queen.

The "orchestra" worked well with the young voices, not overpowering but adding a touch of reality. It consisted of two pianos (Dennis Charvez and David Harrison) and drums (Katie Amstutz) under the direction of Richard Nelson.

The play is all whipped cream and mountain air, sugar and spice. During the pumpkin to coach scene I thought Disney mice would rush out sounding like Alvin the Squirrel and his cohorts, to help Cinderella out of the chimney corner.

Cinderella is the only Rodgers and Hammerstein play written for television. Very light-hearted and charming, it was first seen in 1957 with Julie Andrews as Cinderella, Ikla Chase as the stepmother and those two zanies, Alice Ghostley and Kaye Ballard as the stepsister. CBS claimed that 107 million viewers watched it that night, more than had seen all the other Rodgers and Hammerstein musical combined. The version that is occasionally seen on repeats, because it was filmed, was done seven years later with Leslie Ann Warren in the title role, Walter Pidgeon as the king and Ginger Rogers as the queen. Celeste Holm was the fairy godmother.

The youngsters of the Gilroy Childrens' Theater are in good company.

Cinderella at GHS



Special to the Free Lance

Hollister's Simon Pintello is Prince Charming and Erica Rizzi of Gilroy is Cinderella in the Gilroy Community Theater children's production of the lively musical "Cinderella!" The show is on stage this Friday and Saturday and next, with two casts, one on the boards this weekend and one the next. Performances are at 8 p.m. each day, and at 2 p.m. also on Saturdays'.