

South Valley Civic Theatre

P.O. Box 1555 • Gilroy, California 95021

February 21, 1986

Dear Theatregoers,

South Valley Civic Theatre is announcing that their upcoming performances of "They're Playing Song" have been postponed due to flood damage to the Gilroy High School theatre, and to SVCT set construction materials. The show was previously scheduled to run three consecutive weekends beginning Feb. 28th.

New dates for the musical comedy will be March 28 & 29, April 3, 4, and 5. All shows will be at the Gavilan College Theatre in Gilroy. Curtain time is 8:00 p.m.

The first weekend of the newly scheduled performances will be benefit shows, with \$1.00 from each ticket going toward the restoration of the Gilroy High School Theatre. During the recent rain storms the theatre suffered major damage, with flooding in the seating area and over a foot of water on the raised stage. The GHS administration, and drama instructor Jim Maya, have always been very generous allowing use of the facility to south county organizations, and availability of the theatre will be keenly missed by the community.

South Valley Civic Theatre had originally planned performances of "They're Playing Our Song" in Hollister at the San Benito High School Theatre as part of the program to bring live local theatre events to the entire south valley. With damage to set building materials the opening of the show had to be delayed, and the Hollister high school facility is not available again until late spring. SVCT will continue with plans to bring a production from their 1986-1987 season of shows to Hollister later this year. It is hoped that Hollister residents will travel the now-dry Bolsa Highway to attend performances at Gavilan College, twenty minutes way.

"They're Playing Our Song" is a romantic musical comedy written by Neil Simon, with music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Carole Bayer Sager. The show is being directed by Doug Hagdohl, with musical direction by John Fields, and stars Dennis Charvez of Hollister as composer Vernon Gersch and Suzie Chastang of Morgan Hill as lyricist Sonia Walsk. The on-again, off-again romance between Vernon and Sonia is continuously and humorously interrupted by the unexpected appearances of their respective singing "consciences" played by Cynthia Marie, Janet Ackerman, Tricia Murphy, Chris Souza, Murat Montero and John Dixon.

Phone numbers to call for information or ticket reservations are 842-SHOW (message phone) or 637-3214 (co-producers Rod and Marion Pintello). The SVCT Box Office, at 140 W. 5th St. in Gilroy, will be open from 5 - 7 p.m. weekdays from March 24th thru April 3rd.

Leads almost perfect for parts

By Greg Guerin
Miracle Miles Staff

The leads in South Valley Community Theatre's upcoming musical, *They're Playing Our Song*, are just about perfect for their parts in the play which opens tonight.

"A lot of the time up there, I'm not acting," commented Susie Chastang, who plays the part of lyricist Sonia Walski in the play which is based rather loosely on the relationship between composer Marvin Hamlisch and lyricist Carol Bayer Sager.

"She's scatterbrained and always late, but not inconsiderate late, and she worries and cares about other people. The way she deals with things is the way I would deal with things," the 22-year old Morgan Hill resident added. She worries about how breaking up will affect her boyfriend and won't leave an incompetent psychiatrist because she feels sorry for him.

Dennis Charvez, who is cast opposite Chastang as Vernon Gersch, claims that he is not as uptight as his character, but "his emotionalism and irritability are somewhat like mine."

Charvez is perfect for the part in one respect, co-producer Marion Pintello noted, in that he is an accomplished pianist. He plays several times while working out melodies to go with Chastang's lyrics and accompanies himself on one solo.

For the parts of his character which are unlike himself, Charvez noted, he sometimes uses something he sees in another person.

"What I try to do is establish some similarities with the character. I read the script to see how he interacts with other characters and just have to analyze the lines," he added.

The two characters are almost opposites and eventually come to see that each has something the other needs.

"He has barriers, walls that he puts up. She's a breeze that comes in. Her carefreeness is attractive to him," Charvez noted.

Chastang's character sees Gersch as a stabilizing influence in her life. "He shows her that she needs to grow up."

"I hope the character will be complete to the audience," Chastang added, explaining that many of Neil Simon's character's have been somewhat one-dimensional.

Like any play by the author of *The Odd Couple*, *Plaza Suite*, and *The Goodbye Girl*, *They're Playing Our Song* is full of quick-witted one-liners.

"Nobody talks like that," Charvez remarked.

Chastang, on the other hand, saw the jokes as indicative of the character's personality. "Most people think things and don't say them. In this play, they do."

Another device the playwright has used for revealing character is the inclusion of three Consciences for each of the main characters. The Consciences, according to Sonia Walski, are Passion, Ego, and Skepticism. She, and then Gersch, interact with them when working out songs.

In addition to revealing personality, Charvez said, they also break the monotony of two characters.

Charvez and Chastang play the only speaking parts in the musical, leaving the stage only to change costumes and get ready to enter another scene.

For both, this will be their first lead role, although both have considerable experience in community theater. Chastang had a featured role in Gilroy Community Theater's production of *Company* and last summer played Lily St. Regis, opposite Charvez' Rooster Hannigan, in GCT's *Annie*.

Working together in *Annie* and being friends has helped them relax with each other on stage in this play, Chastang said. "You're secure with that person?"

Charvez lists credits with GCT, Gavilan College, and San Jose Civic Light Opera. With GCT, he has appeared in *Side by Side by Sondheim* and *South Pacific*. His first adult role was in Gavilan's production of *Guys and Dolls*.

The 23-year old Gilroy native had chorus roles in SJCLO productions of *Annie*, *Evita*, and *A Chorus Line*.

That experience helps keep him from being nervous about his part. "Two years ago, I would have been scared in this part," he admitted. He said that he probably would get nervous right before he went on stage. "I just try to make it positive energy. If you let it eat at you, it can be negative."

"You develop concentration and a tolerance the more shows you do," Chastang interjected. "It's a training. We're going to have to learn to deal with it. It's only going to get worse as we go on."

Both young actors have professional ambitions and have applied to work with a summer stock theater in Michigan, The Barn, as one of the first steps in being accepted into Actors' Equity, the actors' union.

They're Playing Our Song opens tonight, with additional performances tomorrow and next Friday and Saturday. All performances begin at 8 p.m. in the Gavilan College Theater.

Familiar song for acting pair



Evan Yee/Viva

By Billy Allstetter
Staff Writer

Sometimes it's hard to tell just who is talking.

Are the songwriting team of Gersch and Walsk answering questions — or is it South Valley Civic Theater actors Dennis Charvez and Suzie Chastang discussing their lead parts in the Neil Simonesque comedy, *They're Playing Our Song*?

One moment, Charvez and Chastang are discussing how they became best friends at Gavilan College. Then they quickly slip into

a scene from the play that opens Friday at Gavilan College Theater. Even when they are playing themselves, they banter back and forth in a Neil Simonesque series of one-liners.

Not only do the characters they play resemble their own personalities, they have rehearsed so much they have almost become the parts they play.

"It gives me the creeps sometimes," said Chastang, 22. "Like when I say, 'I feel personally responsible for the happiness of the people I care about.' I'm barely acting up there."

Chastang plays the part of a flaky lyricist, Sonya Walsk, who is "extremely bright, speaks with candor and honesty and has enormous energy and enthusiasm." She also is scatterbrained, always late and only wears costumes from Broadway plays.

Charvez plays the part of a serious songwriter, Vernon Gersch, with whom Sonya is trying to collaborate. His apartment is always neat, he is punctual to a fault, and he has cleanly ended three engagements in the past year.

Right off, however, Vernon realizes that they are both flaky and that "two flakes can start a snowstorm." Their squabbles over songwriting techniques, Sonya's on-again-off-again boyfriend Leon, as well as their own tempestuous romance, creates a humorously stormy situation.

The flames are fanned by "the boys" and "the girls" — two threesomes who play the actors' consciences. Sonya's girls are her "ego, scepticism and passion" who try to sway Sonya's feelings with songs they sing in a style reminiscent of The Supremes. Vernon's boys tell his innermost feelings through Bee Gee routines.

"They know each other so well there are those little sparks that are fun to watch," said the play's director, Doug Hagdohl II. "It's easier because it's not contrived."

Charvez, who lives in Hollister, and Chastang, a Morgan Hill resident, met in the spring of 1982 while working together on a Gavilan College production of *Rumplestiltskin*. Since then, they have paired up for a number of plays, including last summer's production of *Annie* as the scheming Rooster and his girlfriend.

In spite of the romances on stage, they say there is no romance in real life — just a very close friendship based on similar experiences and a common outlook.

"We're like Laverne and Shirley," said Charvez. "We're best of friends."

They also both have their eyes on acting careers. They have performed in several South County plays and Dennis recently performed in the San Jose Civic Light Opera's production of *Evita*.

The next step in both their careers is obtaining the Equity card of the professional actors' union. They have both applied to act in a summer repertory theater in Michigan which would earn them those valued cards.

They originally performed a scene from *They're Playing Our Song* in an acting class at Gavilan in the fall of 1984. Chastang has wanted to do the part ever since.

The play was originally scheduled to open in Hollister March 7 and 8 and then move to Gilroy High School Theater for performances on March 14 and 15. But plans had to be changed when the high school theater flooded.

It will now be performed at Gavilan at 8 p.m. this Friday and Saturday and next Friday and Saturday.

Tickets cost \$7.50 for adults and \$5 for students and seniors. One dollar from each ticket sold this weekend will be go to Gilroy High School for repairs to the high school theater.

Above: Dennis Charvez as Vernon belts out a number as Sonya — Suzie Chastang — watches. From left in the photo at right, Cynthia Marie, Janet Ackerman and Tricia Murphy join Chastang in a song.



'Song' is romantic interlude

By Kathy McKenzie
Viva Editor

The show finally went on.

South Valley Civic Theater finally got a chance to show its stuff in *They're Playing Our Song*, postponed (as everyone must know by now) because of the flooding of Gilroy High School Theater.

They're Playing Our Song is a pleasant kind of musical, one

Play review

where romance calls the tune and it's fun for both the audience and cast. No deep messages here — just a good time.

The energetic performances of Suzie Chastang and Dennis Charvez in the lead roles add much to the show. Charvez fit his role of composer Vernon Gersch to a T

— first showing his sophisticated side, then showing his human weaknesses — such as being unable to jump in and out of a convertible without tripping.

Charvez also was able to make all the songs sound good. His strong voice really stood out on his numbers, particularly *Fill In The Words*.

Chastang, as lyricist Sonia Walsk, is charming as the slightly strange woman who works her way into Charvez' life. After a while, her logic did start to make sense to the audience, and Chastang brought that to life.

However, her voice tended to fade out on some songs, a problem for an audience unfamiliar with the lyrics.

This may have been partly an orchestral problem. In the first act, the orchestra overpowered the singers at certain points. However, by Act Two, the orchestra has

eased up on the volume, which helped a lot.

Generally, the musical backup was quite good, ably led by John Fields.

Also notable were the "boys" and the "girls," a sort of Greek chorus that both Sonia and Vernon carried around. As the inner voices, the trios coached, scolded, gave advice and backed up the principles on the musical numbers.

Tricia Murphy, Janet Ackerman and Cynthia Marie as the "girls" and Chris Souza, Murat Montero and John Dixon as the "boys" added a lot to the show, weaving in and out of the action during some of the show's best scenes.

This is the last weekend to see *They're Playing Our Song*. It's well suited to anyone longing for a romantic spring musical to go to.

4/13/86

***They're Playing Our Song* suffers from delay**

By Jim Maya
Miracle Miles Staff

South Valley Civic Theater opened their latest production, *They're Playing Our Song*, last Friday night to a sparse audience. The Neil Simon-Marvin Hamlisch-Carole Bayer Sager musical is one of my favorite "light" shows.

As we realized that the house was going to be very small, I became disappointed that so few people had chosen to see the flood-plagued show on its opening night.

Unfortunately, I think many in the opening night audience now wish they had chosen to see the show on closing night. It was not the kind of opening that actors dream of.

The production has been the victim of many troubles for which they cannot be blamed. The flood not only forced a postponement; it also caused a change in location to the Gavilan College Theatre. (*Song* was to have opened in Hollister and moved to the G.H.S. stage.) Such delays can cause a whole company and staff to lose momentum, timing and spirit. We are amateurs here, after all. The company cannot put aside their livelihoods, families, and a host of other obligations like the big time pros can.

I think some of the opening night problems, such as the many lighting miscues and other technical flaws, would have been avoided if the show had been able to open on time. More time does not always work to your advantage.

The stars of the show, Susie Chastang and Dennis Charvez, two of our most talented performers, also had their problems. It was obvious to those of us who know Suzie that her voice was hurting from the moment she first began to sing. She is a trooper though, and never let the disaster show for a moment in her dialogue. She was always in character.

Charvez, who also did not let things get to him, has one of the finest voices anywhere, and was in great form. . . when you could hear him. Dennis has had volumn difficulties on the Gavilan stage before. In this case, the orchestra was too loud much of the time while he was singing. Again, this was a problem caused by the short amount of rehearsal time in the Gavilan Theatre. this was sad, because the orchestra, under the direction of John Fields, sounded great for most of the evening.

What could not be excused, however, was the lack-luster use of the main character's alter-egos by director Doug Hagdohl, Jr. They should be one of the most creative and energetic aspects of the show. The six characters, a sort of modern Greek chorus reflecting the feelings of the two leads, were slowed by poor staging.

The good news is that things went much better for the second night audience. Laughter rang out in spots where there had been silence the night before. Many of the technical flaws had been corrected and the vocal problems were correcting themselves.

I would encourage you to go see the show on this, its closing weekend. The production should continue to improve, and it does have great lines and wonderful songs. Call 847-SHOW for tickets.

The also flood-delayed G.H.S. production of *Ordinary People* finally opens tonight at 8 p.m. at the G.H.S. Theatre. This ia the annual student-directed-and-produced production. Kevin Rubio has directed with Kevin Fallis and Jennifer Weiler sharing the lead role of Conrad/Connie Jarrett, which was played by Timothy Hutton in the film. Rob Roy, Marcia Hammelev and Sherrie Drake share the parent roles. The show continues on the 5th, and the 11th and 12th.

San Benito High School Drama Club opens the slapstick comedy, *Out of the Frying Pan*, on the 10th in their theatre. Curtain is at 8:00 with additional shows on the 11th and 12th. Tickets are \$3.50 and \$2.00.