

Silly rabbit, tricks are for kids!

Gilroy Dispatch

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Chris Riley



Amanda Rigdon, right, and Angelica Magnisi primp their petals as they get ready for a scene.

MORGAN HILL – South Valley Civic Theatre brings Lewis Carroll's classic tale of a curious, young girl who wanders through a mysterious and magical wonderland to life as it presents the children's musical "Follow That Rabbit, The Wonderland Story" Friday night at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

Everyone is excited for opening night – the cast has memorized the lines, parents have finished every last detail on the costumes and the set glitters under the spotlight.

While learning to sing and dance their way through Wonderland, the 36 young performers – ranging in age from 7 to 13 – had the opportunity to work with three veteran directors. A few weeks into rehearsals, Carol Harris scrambled to find a replacement after her son was critically injured in a motorcycle accident. Fortunately, Betsy Andrade and Rosalind Farotte agreed to step in and direct the show.

"It was a little bit of a setback, but we've muddled through," said Producer Becky Kaiser.



Anna Parker as Alice walks with the Caterpillar, played by Deanna McGill.

"Carol has it mapped out and has such a vision. (Betsy and Rosalind) didn't know her vision, but because they are who they are, they have made it easy," explained producer Joy Reynolds. "It was actually a harder transition for the children."



Connor Bray, right, as the Mock Turtle and Emily Castro as the Lori rehearse their parts Wednesday night.

"At first it was confusing," said Alexandra Mandel, 11, who plays the Cheshire Cat, "because the new directors didn't know what Carol had done. But they are great directors and figured out everything really fast."

Harris, who was also in charge of musical direction and choreography, has continued her role as piano accompanist.

Despite the unexpected loss of Harris as director, the production remains on schedule for opening night. Harris mapped out every detail and the board of directors offered extra support to the producers. Kaiser sends weekly newsletters to parents updating them on the production.

Before the show was even cast, Harris sketched all the costumes and then chose fabrics and patterns with the help of Kaiser and Reynolds. These sketches, as well as Harris' set of drawings, will be on display in the playhouse lobby during the run of the show.

According to Kaiser, the children's production is designed to "give young performers the chance to be on stage."

The children's show is unique because it offers students an opportunity to play both leading roles and a wide variety of smaller parts. These productions tend to be a family affair, as parents become an important part of the experience. Everyone pitches in to help build the set, sew costumes and lend a hand around the theater.

Mandel is just one of the young actresses looking forward to opening night. She said she loves playing the Cheshire Cat because, "You can put a lot of actions and personality into the lines. It's not just a straight role."

This is Mandel's 11th play and seventh with South Valley Civic Theatre. Her favorite part of doing theater is "seeing the audience out there for the first time and seeing it all come together."

She has also enjoyed working in the new Playhouse which opened in January and is located on the corner of Monterey Road and Dunne Avenue.

"It's terrific, absolutely fabulous. We get our own new dressing rooms and the sound, tech and lighting is great. It's kind of cool to be the first people to use the theater," she said.

"The kids are having fun," Reynolds said. "Everybody treats each other really well. That's community theater."

Alice and Wonderland arrive

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By Megan Stevens

South Valley Civic Theatre brings an interpretation of Lewis Carroll's classic tale of a curious, young girl who wanders through a mysterious and magical wonderland to life as it presents the children's musical "Follow That Rabbit, The Wonderland Story" starting tonight at the Community Playhouse.

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The show is the second SVCT production since the Playhouse in the Community Center complex opened.