

Enjoy ‘A Tuna Christmas’ for a good cause

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By Carol Harris, October 31, 2012



Steve Spencer and Kae Jenny-Spencer direct “A Tuna Christmas.”

“A Tuna Christmas” is coming to the Gilroy Center for the Arts this month and you don’t want to miss it! Watching Kevin Heath and Bill Tindall portray 22 different wacky characters, you will be delightfully entertained. But there is much more to this performance than simply an enjoyable introduction to the holiday season.

Directed by Steve Spencer and Kae Jenny-Spencer, “A Tuna Christmas” will mark the husband and wife’s fourth annual “You Can’t Take It With You” benefit for Team Fox, which is the grassroots community fundraising program of the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research.

There will be 11 performances. Eleven opportunities for a tax-deductible donation which is included in the price of your ticket and a raffle at each performance with all proceeds benefiting the Fox Foundation.

I first met Steve Spencer in 1993 when we both performed in SVCT's production of "Death Trap." Steve played the lead, Sydney Bruhl, and I was Helga ten Dorp. Steve was brilliant, not only as an actor but also behind the scenes with his ongoing quick wit and constant supply of jokes. Three years later I had the pleasure of working with both Steve and Kae when I directed "James and the Giant Peach" and they ran the sound.

Their daughter Alika, now a professional actress, was in the cast as "The Green Grasshopper." When I needed incidental music to enhance the play, Steve immediately came up with everything I asked for. Another of his many attributes is music lover and owner of a vast library of recordings. In 2002, as music director, I again teamed with the Spencer's in "Gypsy," with Steve as director. Kae was cast as the trumpet playing stripper and Alika played the young Gypsy Rose Lee. I couldn't help but notice not only the Spencer family's support of each other, but their incredible passion for the theater. With Steve at the helm, the musical was a success.

In 2005, we came together again in "Inspecting Carol," with Kae directing and Steve and me on stage. As we made quick costume changes back stage I noticed that Steve was having difficulty buttoning his coat. Later, I learned that Steve was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

Parkinson's is a degenerative neurological disorder whose symptoms typically progress from mild tremors to complete physical incapacitation. There is no known cure for Parkinson's disease and current treatments only mask the symptoms but do not alter or slow the progression of the disease. If you were to meet Steve on the street today and didn't know that he has Parkinson's, you might think he was drunk. In fact, he can tell you a very funny story about just such an experience. If you have the chance, ask him. He is articulate, his quick wit is as sharp as ever and he still has an amazing sense of humor, right down to a joke he can tell about almost every situation that arises. Retired from the Morgan Hill School District, Steve is still active in the teacher's union, volunteering his time to assist fellow educators.

"He may have Parkinson's disease but it doesn't define him as a person," said Kevin Heath, owner of Limelight Actor's Theater. "When we're together I don't notice the disease. We still have the same friendship and still laugh together like we always did. He is the same person I met in 2000. A weaker person would have let this disease take over, but not Steve. He thrives on normality."

This year, Steve's goal is to raise at least \$7,000 to enable the Michael J. Fox Foundation to continue aggressively funding research to find better treatments and ultimately a cure for Parkinson's disease.

"I chose to organize this fundraiser as part of Team Fox because I suffer from Parkinson's," said Spencer. "I wanted to do something to fight this disease, not only for my own self-interest, but for everyone who lives with this wretched disease. The Fox Foundation funds cutting edge research to bring meaningful advances in treatment and eventually a cure to people like me who are afflicted by PD."

Nearly 5 million people worldwide are living with the disease. In the United States, 60,000 new cases will be diagnosed this year alone. The annual economic cost of Parkinson's in the U.S. is estimated to exceed \$25 billion.

Become actively involved in the race for a cure by visiting Fox Trial Finder on the Internet.

It's time for "A Tuna Christmas"

New show at Limelight Theater raises money for a good cause

Carly Gelsinger, Staff Writer

It's said that laughter is the best form of medicine - and that may be especially true this holiday season as Limelight Theater in Gilroy presents a special comedy to raise money for Parkinson's disease.

Laugh with the lovable redneck characters of the famous satire, "A Tuna Christmas" this holiday seas, a two-man show that focuses on the lives of people in the redneck town of Tuna, TX, and Limelight will donate \$7 on every ticket to the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's.

The play is directed by Steve and Kae Jenn-Spencer, theater veterans who have been actively raising money for the Michael J. Fox foundation ever since Steve was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2005.

Kevin Heath, Gilroy Art Alliance director who stars in teh play along with Bill Tindall of Morgan Hill, said reservations for the play are already filling up.

"For the first time as a theater, I'm looking at this and thinking we'll have a full house every night," Heath said.

Heath and Tindall play 11 characters each. Heath said the show retains a high level of energy with lightning fast costume changes and surprising character switches.

As usual, guests are welcome to come early to the performance and bring dinner or snacks and mingle with their friends.

"We are the only theater we know of in a 100-mile radius that allows people to bring dinner to the show," Heath reminded.

Limelight will also beholding raffles at each show for gift cards to local restaurants, wineries, vacation homes, and professional portrait packages.

"A Tuna Christmas", opened Nov. 16. Performances are scheduled for Nov. 23, 24, 25, 30, and Dec. 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8. Tickets are \$25, and reservations are recommended.