

South Valley

South Valley Magazine | SouthValley.com
Serving Morgan Hill, Gilroy & San Martin

Mismatched pairs

Unrequited love in Sondheim's 'Follies'

Susan Rife | September 15, 2017

<http://southvalley.com/follies-svct-2017/>



Emily Hansen and Andy Gonzalez playing young Sally and young Buddy in 'Follies'. Playing through Oct. 7, 2017 at SVCT.
Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

From the opening languorous procession of Broadway showgirls in stupendous headdresses and a boatload of sequins and rhinestones, through the finale and final bows of the cast, be prepared to be dazzled by South Valley Civic Theatre's production of Stephen Sondheim's *Follies*.

Director Megan Griffin has assembled a cast of triple-threat actors, singers and dancers who deliver on all levels in this musical story of a group of Ziegfeld Follies-like dancers who gather for a reunion as the Weismann Theater on Broadway is about to be demolished to make way for precious New York City parking in 1971. Chief among them are Follies dancers Sally and Phyllis and the men who wooed and married them: Ben and Buddy.

Each couple's 30-year marriage has faced its challenges. First off, Sally was in love with Ben but married the philandering Buddy Plummer. She's been carrying a torch ever since.

The other couple, Ben and Phyllis, were mismatched from the start on intellectual, economic and social levels. The Stones are unhappy and bitter.

As the reunion begins and the Follies alumnae in elegant gowns greet each other as long-lost friends.

The show pairs younger versions of the characters with their more seasoned and disillusioned selves. “Waiting for the Girls Upstairs” showcases Callie Camacho-Light as Phyllis Rogers Stone, Brianna Pember as Young Phyllis, Suzanne Guzzetta as Sally Durant Plummer, Emily Hansen as Young Sally, Bob Brown as Benjamin Stone, Edie Garcia-Flores as Young Ben, Michael Kaelin as Buddy Plummer and Andy Gonzalez as Young Buddy.

Virtually every character gets a chance to shine, either solo or in an ensemble song.

And although the show truly belongs to the four central characters, its heart is in Sally, with her deep emotional longing for what she could not—and cannot ever—have. Suzanne Guzzetta, with a lovely voice, lays her emotions totally bare in the aching “In Buddy’s Eyes” and “Losing My Mind.”

Michael Kaelin’s Buddy is a true song and dance man, neatly marrying comedy and pathos into a singular package of energy with top-notch vocals and Chaplinesque physical comedy. “The Right Girl,” at the top of the second act, is a tour de force.

Our other unhappy couple, the Stones, are equally ill-suited to one another. As Ben, Bob Brown is appropriately ill at ease, and grabs our sympathy in “The Road You Didn’t Take.” He’s partnered with the sensational Callie Camacho-Light, who sashays her way through “Could I Leave You?” leaving no question as to the answer.

Sondheim’s scores leave little room for error, and the cast is up to the challenge, ably assisted by vocal director Carol Harris, music director Alan Chipman and a 13-piece band (which sometimes overpowers some sung vocals). Choreographers Christine Carrillo and Jessica Damron keep the dance action lively.

Michelle Griffin and Adrienne Wilkinson’s costume designs and headdresses are truly spectacular, awash in sparkles, satin and chiffon. Bravo all around!

Curtain Up Theater Review by Camille Bounds: South Valley Civic Theatre's "Follies"

Published on *MorganHillLife.com* on September 12, 2017

<http://gilroylife.com/2017/09/12/curtain-up-theater-review-by-camille-bounds-south-valley-civic-theatres-follies/>

by Camille Bounds | Sep 12, 2017

South Valley Civic Theatre brings to the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse a glittering version of Stephen Sondheim's beloved Broadway musical "Follies" with 36 actors under the direction of Megan Griffin and 13 musicians under the baton of Alan Chipman. The show takes a breath-taking sweep that immerses the audience into nostalgia to the ultimate degree.



Photo by Jason Leong

The story brings together a reunion of the aging former showgirls who once performed together as a part of Broadway's glamorous Weismann's Follies, based on The Ziegfeld Follies of that time. They gather in a dilapidated theater for a last hurrah where they experienced their youth and loves 30 years earlier. It's the last night for the theater, which is going to be torn down to make room for a parking lot.

The older women relive their past as the young, gloriously-costumed ghosts of their youth follow them through their reliving their glory days. Two couples, Sally and Buddy and Phyllis and Ben, are focused on where they were 30 years ago and where they are today and what they desire at this time of their lives. They are haunted by their past lives with middle-aged disenchantment and have to make decisions of where they want to go in this present time.



Photo by Elizabeth Mandel

Sondheim's enchanting songs from "Follies" have become standards. They include "Broadway Baby", "I'm Still Here", "Losing My Mind", "Too Many Mornings", and "Could I leave You?"

This cast and director are dedicated to bring this sweet and sad show a 110 percent effort in performing. The number where the older gals and their young ghosts redo a production they did in the old days captivated the audience the opening weekend.

If there is an award for costumes in this area of community theater, Michelle Griffin and Adrienne Wilkinson should be without a doubt recipients. Their elaborate and glittering gowns and head pieces are amazing and first-rate in craftsmanship.

Follies opened on Broadway April 4, 1971. Sondheim's music and lyrics brought audiences to heights and depths that is rare in musicals experience. The original show was directed by Harold Prince and Michael Bennett and was nominated for 11 Tony awards. It won seven.

SVCT's "Follies" will provide local audiences with a distinctive musical that warns all to tread carefully into the past.

South Valley

South Valley Magazine | SouthValley.com
Serving Morgan Hill, Gilroy & San Martin

<http://southvalley.com/svct-follies-costume-design/>

Stars of the show

Michelle Griffin and Adrienne Wilkinson's designs dazzle

Debra Eskinazi | September 11, 2017



SPARKLE & SHINE Elaborate costumes take center stage in South Valley Civic Theatre's production of 'Follies' running Sept. 8-Oct. 7, 2017. Photo: Chris Foster

When a group of past performers discover their beloved, but crumbling, Broadway theater is scheduled for demolition, they gather for one last hurrah in their old haunt.

Based on the famous Ziegfeld Follies of Broadway, stars of the theatrical revue "Weismann's Follies" reminisce about their time on stage in South Valley Civic Theatre's (SVCT) performance of Follies by Stephen Sondheim. Unlike most of SVCT's shows, which rely on exciting set designs, Follies is anchored by elaborate costumes and musical numbers.

The show's costumers Michelle Griffin and Adrienne Wilkinson worked together on the designs for the cast of 36. The actors, ages 17-70, perform much of the show as duets.

"The 12 Follies 'Ghosts' each have a costume that is representative of a particular decade from the 1910s through the 1940s," says Griffin, who researched costuming for each of the periods represented. With \$2,000 and six weeks to produce what took original Broadway costumers two years and a budget of more than \$100,000 to pull off, Griffin says they are proud of the results.

“Each ‘Ghost’ costume has a unique shape and each elaborate headdress (created by Wilkinson) is very different from the next,” says Griffin.

Griffin says they repurposed many products from Dollar Store scouring pads and wire trash cans to car backrests—anything that could create a shape and be turned into a headpiece—the tallest of which is 3 ½ feet tall.

“We used flowers, old jewelry, feathers from old costumes, fairy wings, Christmas ornaments and picks and so much more,” she says.

Because the script calls for a limited color palette of black and white, the designers employed the use of texture, sparkle and costume shape to add visual interest.

Griffin says the workload was tremendous and unlike any of other 10 shows she’s costumed for.

“This has been my biggest challenge and has put forth the most spectacular costumes.”

She says they were fortunate to receive a large amount of help from the cast who took part in sewing, painting and rhinestoning of the costumes.

A powerful complement to the embellished ensembles is the music that accompanies the performance. “We’ve changed the show through live orchestra, elaborate costumes and very strong vocal, choreography and acting talent,” says the show’s producer Marianne Snook.

Though *Follies* is the seventh show Snook has produced, she says this is her first all-adult cast. Snook says the shows characters reconsider their lives and how they acted as friends. There is a lot of rehashing of relationship issues during the show, which she says is achieved through flashbacks as each of the actors are “paired” with their younger selves—ghost dancers—“playing out the vision of the memory they are speaking of.”

Snook says the Sondheim’s songs are emotional and complex, resonating with anyone looking at their life in retrospect. Reflecting on their glory days, taking stock of their lives—a compendium of dreams. Silicon Valley Civic Theatre presents ‘Follies’. Performances run Sept. 8-Oct. 7, 2017 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road, Morgan Hill. For more information, visit: svct.org.

Entertainment: Step back in time with South Valley Civic Theatre's 'Follies'

Story reveals the falsity of the characters' dreams

Published in the August 30 – September 12, 2017 issue of Morgan Hill Life

<http://morganhilllife.com/2017/08/25/entertainment-step-back-in-time-with-south-valley-civic-theatres-follies/>

by Marty Cheek | Aug 25, 2017

When Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for his 1971 Broadway show "Follies," he gave audiences an affectionate look at the American musical theater between the two world wars.

The South Valley Civic Theatre invites musical fans to step back in time and discover the "ghosts" haunting a crumbling Broadway theater where the past performers of the "Weismann's Follies" meet for a heart-tugging reunion the day before the building is torn down.

The story of "Follies" looks at the traditional conventions of the musical genre to reveal the hollowness and falsity of the characters' dreams and illusions as the former showgirls remember their glory days, said Marianne Snook, the show's producer.



Photo by Chris Foster

Actors, from left, Lindsay Sommers, Rebecca Reynolds, Paetra Rottman and Krista Warner, in their "Follies" costumes.



Photo by Chris Foster

"While we get glimpses into who they are now, we also get to see through their 'ghosts' and memories played out by their younger selves who they once were," she said. "We get to experience the raw reality, the harsh reality of where they aspire to be in life versus where they see themselves now."

While SVCT prides itself on its intricate and beautiful sets for most of its musical shows, "Follies" in contrast takes place on an empty stage. The show's director, Megan Griffin, took on the challenge of building an over-the-top adventure for SVCT's audience using other theatrical elements.

"The cast of 36 is one of the most talented group of singers, actors and dancers ever gathered at SVCT," Snook said. "We will have a large, live orchestra. As Sondheim is one of the most complex composers, this is not to be missed. The music will blow the audience away."

The orchestra is led by longtime SVCT music director, Alan Chipman. The choreography is by Christine Carrillo and Jessica Damron who have worked hard with the performers to recreate the feel of the old-time Ziegfeld Follies-style revue shows. The vocal director, Carol Harris, makes sure the performers belt out their Broadway tunes with gusto. An array of amazing showgirl costumes were created for "Follies" by Michele Griffin and Adrienne Wilkinson.

“We will be brought back to the glory days of the Follies as if we never left,” Snook said. “Sparkly, colorful, elegant, fun costumes are topped off by some of the most fantastic headdresses ever which have been handmade by Adrienne.”

Actress Suzanne Guzzetta performs the role of the grown-up version of Sally Durant nostalgically visiting the theater one last time in “Follies”.

“On a deeper level, while Sally comes off as perky and friendly, really she’s quite fragile emotionally. The desires of her youth were stymied, and rather than develop a new plan she let life happen to her,” Guzzetta said. “Sondheim uses lyrics and music in such incredible ways to portray the subtle variations occurring beneath the surface.”

Edie Garcia-Flores portrays the young version of Benjamin Stone. He describes his character as naïve, a man who fails to see long-term consequences to his life choices.



Photo by Chris Foster

“He chooses to accept a love that he thinks he deserves which only assures his monetary well-being and not his emotional well-being,” Garcia-Flores said. “While still an intelligent individual, he has difficulty expressing his inner thoughts and chooses to guard his emotions. It eventually becomes second nature to him.”

The story of “Follies” brings into light the death of the American Dream, grief and the loss of innocence, he said. By juxtaposing colors, lyrics, and stylings in his musical numbers Sondheim helps the audience ride the same roller coaster of life as do the characters in the show.

Myra Kaelin portrays Stella Deems as a confident, mostly happy woman, but with an underlying sense of loss. Her song “Who’s That Woman?” talks about this strange person she sees every day in front of her mirror. The woman is not the person she remembers but someone laced with weariness and sadness, Kaelin said.

Sondheim’s lyrics and music are “difficult” and full of emotional depth, she said.

“The melodies are unusual and haunting. The lyrics often contradict the cheery music you’re hearing. While Stella tap dances her way around the stage, she sings: ‘Who’s that woman? I mean I see that woman, who’s joking, but choking back tears...’”

SVCT board president Peter Mandel said one reason the selection committee chose “Follies” to open the 2017-2018 season was because the show has one of the best Broadway musical scores with music and lyrics that will entertain as well as challenge audiences.

“Stephen Sondheim is one of the most brilliant composers in the history of musical theater. SVCT has done many of his shows over the past years, but never attempted ‘Follies,’” he said. “Over the years SVCT has been able and willing to tackle some of the more challenging shows in theater such as ‘Next to Normal’ and ‘God of Carnage’ to bring a broader variety of theater to the South Bay. It was time for us to bring ‘Follies’ to our stage for our community. It’s just an amazing show.”