

SVCT's 'It's a Wonderful Life' brings Christmas joy to local audiences

Scott Lynch returns in this version as Clarence as the guardian angel

by [Marty Cheek](#) | Published in the November 7 – 20, 2018 issue of Morgan Hill Life

http://morganhilllife.com/2018/11/02/arts-entertainment-svcts-its-a-wonderful-life-brings-christmas-joy-to-local-audiences/?fbclid=IwAR38ogQkDSVbYdZhg8aSo85IWWaxhFx80Utr92eYY-Umxn40_N9atE0UK8

For Scott Lynch, "It's A Wonderful Life" is a wonderful story. The holiday tale of the redemption has impacted him on a deeply personal level, and he believes it can shine a light of hope on an America now facing dark days of divisiveness.

South Valley Civic Theatre's revival of the show "It's a Wonderful Life" provides a chance for Lynch to gain a fresh look at the Christmas drama based on the classic Frank Capra film of 1946 starring James Stewart. Ten years ago, the Gilroy resident played the main role of George Bailey, a good man who makes his home in the small town of Bedford Falls and learns at the end of the story his life does matter to his friends and family. With SVCT's revival of the play opening Nov. 9 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, Lynch will help tell the Bailey's child-like guardian angel who guides him through his journey through darkness into the light.



Joseph McCarty, as George Bailey, and Audrey Del Prete, as Mary Bailey, in South Valley Civic Theatre's production of "It's a Wonderful Life."

"The play came to me in a time of my life that I was just going through a lot of changes, and a lot of it resonated with me," Lynch said of the 2008 show. "And it became a very special experience as a result. Plus, it was the first show I did with SVCT. A lot of the people in it became great friends."

Since then, Lynch has appeared in or produced several SVCT shows as well as served on the community theater group's board of directors. He was pleased to hear that "It's a Wonderful Life" would be the holiday show for the 2018-2019 season because the message of hope over despair it provides is one he hopes will resonate equally with the audience.

"There hasn't been too many shows that I've been in that really had that emotional appeal," he said. "And Clarence is, in my mind, a father figure for George. Here's his chance for him to get his wings, which he's been working on for 200 years, and so he has that kind of self-motivation."

Carol Harris directs the new rendition. She also directed the 2008 version. The revival of "It's a Wonderful Life" has a set design that includes rear-projection video to show the audience the look and feel of Bedford Falls.

"It's a story for today. It's a hopeful story," Harris said in an interview at the SVCT warehouse during a recent rehearsal. "This show of kindness conquering meanness is what we need right now."

In the story, Clarence meets a suicidal George one Christmas Eve on a bridge outside the community. The angel shows him all the lives he has touched over the years.

In a dark sequence he makes George face the truth of how different life in his community and the people in it would be if he had never been born. The message of the story is that a good man's life can have a ripple effect on the people around him, Harris said.

SVCT's revival version will be different because Joseph McCarty, who plays George Bailey, brings his own style of personality and acting technique compared to Lynch's, she said.

"He is a very good George. He's just different," she said.

A writing instructor at Evergreen Community College, McCarty portrays George as a good, hard-working man with complex flaws.

"I don't think he's like a hero. I think he's a great character and people can empathize with him very well," the San Jose resident said. "He represents something wonderful and something we all aspire to, but there's a lot struggle and he faces the bad as well as the good."

A big reason the film and stage versions of the story touches the hearts of audiences is because people can relate to many of the frustrations, temptations and other life experiences George faces in his journey, McCarty said. "It's a very human thing. We all face the good and the bad and hopefully we choose the good," he said.

Audrey Del Prete plays the role of Mary Hatch, George's girlfriend and later his wife. A social worker from San Jose, she got ready for the role by the memories of a beloved relative as well as high school romances.

"I was trying to put myself into the shoes of someone who grew up in that time," she said. "Honestly, I've been kind of channeling my grandmother a little bit. Her name was Eva and she was born in 1922. But then it's still relatable to any time, because it's that young teenage love. I'm trying to channel that time when I had a first crush."

The comical role of Bert the policeman is played by Chris Snook, who for years stayed involved with SVCT in the backstage parts of productions and building sets. He decided this small part was perfect for his debut on the stage.

His daughter Becca Snook is now playing the mischief-maker fairy role of Puck in Live Oak High School's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and his son Ben Snook has been in several SVCT roles, winning best supporting actor for a teen show this year at the group's awards show.

Theater is a family affair for the Snooks. Chris's wife, Marianne Snook, has produced several plays and this year received an award for "Outstanding Board Service."

"It makes me a little nervous because everybody here has done a lot of plays, so I'm a bit intimidated, but I try not to show it too much," Chris said of his stepping into acting. "My kids are giving me advice and pointers, and they obviously know more than I do. Bert's a character that knows everyone in town. In Bedford Falls, he's not just a strict policeman, he cares about people, too."

For people who have only seen Capra's film version of "It's a Wonderful Life," the stage version will hold some fun surprises. But ultimately, it stays true to the theme of love for the family and hope for the future, Lynch said.

"Like most of us, we don't really appreciate how good our lives are until we reflect on it. First, George has to reflect on his life, and then out of desperation, Clarence says, 'Let's pretend you were never born and see how other people are impacted by that,'" he said. "I just love the show and ultimately the message is so positive. It ends on such a wonderful note. I think it's great for the season. You kind of go through the darkness, but you end truly in a state of light."

Family relationships

Trust and love restores faith in humanity

By Susan Rife, November 8, 2018 South Valley Magazine

https://southvalley.com/family-relationships/?fbclid=IwAR3VcT8EGuf3C_ArCkf8pt_jZuBI0nBPBFm_OpapQioXpeMSjaEqQhhAj_k

“Don’t mess with success” may be director Carol Harris’s motto for South Valley Civic Theatre’s holiday production of “It’s a Wonderful Life,” a stage version of the hugely successful and well known 1946 Frank Capra film—the one starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed that’s broadcast on TV every single Christmas.



Her cast—starting with Seph McCarty as George Bailey and Audrey Del Prete as Mary—appears to be channeling Stewart and Reed in their rehearsals.

“You have to give it what people are familiar with,” said Harris, who directed the same show for SVCT a decade ago—long enough that Scott Lynch, who played George Bailey in that production, has grown into the role of the fledgling angel Clarence. “I just try to approach the sensitivity of the George character, the family relationships. It’s a story of trust and love and relationships and the fact that if he had never been born, these people would never have ended up in the same way.”

As if a refresher is needed: “It’s a Wonderful Life” is the story of George Bailey, a frustrated businessman in Bedford Falls who’s spent his life giving things up for others, and on Christmas Eve is thinking about ending his life. His guardian angel, Clarence, shows him what life would be like if he’d never been born, and restores his faith in himself and humanity.

McCarty and Del Prete, both San Jose residents who are new to the SVCT stage, are undaunted by the giants of the screen who preceded them.

“The show’s been around forever,” said McCarty, who came to the show without preconceived notions of what role he might play. “It’s tapping into something people can connect with. I feel like that character gets to everyone deep down.”

By contrast, Del Prete specifically auditioned for the role of Mary. “I felt like I was Mary,” she said. “I just think about the other moments in my life that have been similar.”

McCarty said he first saw the film when he was 8 or 10 years old.

“I really am glad to be doing it,” he said. “I feel a genuine connection with the struggle George faces.” Harris thinks the show is a perfect holiday drama and musical.

“The kindness among strangers goes so far,” she said. “George Bailey didn’t have a lot, but what he had he gave away, and it all came back to him.”

The show’s co-producers are Robin Bezanson and Judi Grant. It also stars James Daniel Pearson as Henry Potter, Sean O’Connor as Harry Bailey, Jeff Swan as Uncle Billy, Bob Brown as Mr. Gower, Scotty Gregg as Sam Wainwright and Cambria Pace as Zuzu.