

‘Belles: The Reunion’ brings back wild and wacky Walker sisters

By Camille Bounds

<https://gilroylife.com/2019/07/06/curtains-up-with-camille-bounds-belles-the-reunion-brings-back-wild-and-wacky-walker-sisters/>

Hilarious interactions result from siblings getting together after 25 years



From left to right, Rosalind Farotte playing Peggy and Betsy Andrade playing Aneece in Limelight Actors Theater’s production of “Belles: The Reunion.”

Photo courtesy Limelight Actors Theater

Gilroy’s Limelight Theater serves up audiences with plenty of laughs and complicated relationship challenges among a group of opinionated women in “Belles: The Reunion.” The comedy runs until the July 14 matinee, which was specially added because of the show’s popularity.

Details

What: Belles: The Reunion

When: Closes July 14

Where: Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey Road

Tickets: \$25 and available at www.limelightactorstheater.com

Contact: (408) 472-3292

The sequel to the hit “Belles” by Mark Dunn, which Limelight previously performed, the show will appeal to both those who’ve already fallen in love with the six Walker sisters from Memphis, Tennessee, as well as audiences discovering these telephone-tethered women for the very first time. The women communicate by phone throughout the performance. “Belles: The Reunion” moves 25 years in time from the first production. Some of

the characters haven’t talked to each other in all that time. The uniting of the actors and the timing is extremely well done due to excellent direction of Limelight’s Kevin Heath.

The story starts with the most immediate problem of the Walker’s mama disrobing in the community room of her nursing room, forcing the sisters to unite once more and put their heads together to decide what to do with her. Things get really wild when oldest sister Peggy has been bilked out of all her money by a ne’er-do-well boyfriend. Aneece and Paige’s marriages are on the rocks. Audrey continues to mourn the death of both her husband and her only child with alcohol. Sherry is still trying to earn the respect of her sisters after so many years of being the free-spirited family laughingstock. And Roseanne, after three failed marriages to three minister husbands, has lost both her religious faith and the faith she’s always put in her family. Topping the catastrophes off, a cousin has asked all six Walker siblings to “beta-taste” her new candy, with mutually disastrous gastrointestinal results.



The cast carries the phone premise with smooth conversations about their lives and problems at the moment. Local performers Rosalind Farotte, Christy Walt, Donna Knippen, Christine McElroy, Betsy Andrade and Christine Wanish, move the humorous dialogue at a pace that keeps attention. The experienced cast pulls the satire along with hilarious effect.

The clever set at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, designed by Kevin Heath and Glynis Crabb, puts the six characters in their own “homes” on one stage. It brings an intimacy to each character as the plot moves into their ever more complicated situations.

Tickets can be purchased online. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. with an 8 p.m. curtain. At matinee performances, doors open at 1 p.m. with a 2 p.m. curtain. You can bring dinner and a bottle of wine. There is also a concession with wine and drinks available. If you bring your own food be sure to bring all utensils. Dinner can also be ordered from the Milias Restaurant from their “Limelight Theatre to Go Menu.” Order by noon the day of the show and dinner will be delivered at 7 p.m. Call (408) 337-5100.

South Valley

Personas stand out in 'Belles' sequel

'Belles: The Reunion' runs through July 14

<https://southvalley.com/personas-stand-out-in-belles-sequel/>

By Susan Rife



SISTER DRAMA Christine McElroy (from left), Christine Wanish and Donna Knippen perform a scene in 'Belles: The Reunion.'

Six sisters, some more estranged than others, must face the crisis of their widowed mother behaving badly at her nursing home in *Belles: The Reunion*, a comedy/drama by Mark Dunn running this summer at Limelight Actors Theater in Gilroy.

But the immediate issue—Mom disrobing in the community room—is just the starting point for this mostly-comic show in which all of the dialogue is performed by actors on the phone with each other. Over the course of the show, each sister's personality unfolds, each sibling's relationship is revealed, and what you thought was happening early on turns into something unexpected.

Director and theater co-founder Kevin Heath has drawn together six talented actors to play the Walker sisters—Rosalind Farotte as Peggy, Donna M. Knippen as Audrey, Christine McElroy as Roseanne, Christy Wait as Sherry, Christine Wanish as Paige and Betsy Andrade as Aneece. Each actor manages to carve out, in her eight-foot-square chunk of the stage, a distinct persona in locales as diverse as New York, Santa Fe, Georgia, Iowa and Mississippi.

The family is centered on eldest sister Peggy, who has been the “in charge of Mom” sister for 30 years in Memphis, Tenn., and who keeps up with her sisters’ changes in address and marital status across the miles. She’s also lost all her money to a con artist. Her sister Sherry is the flighty one, prone to tropical-print caftans and too much affection toward her sister’s husband. Roseanne has been married three times to pastors, which she calls “dancing-bear narcissists.” Audrey’s been drowning her grief in the bottle for decades over the deaths of her son and her husband; even her hospital gig as Bimbles the Clown gives her no relief. Paige’s marriage is on the rocks as well, in an unexpected way. And Aneece, out of contact with her family for four years, is a lesbian in a relationship crisis of her own.

The show’s gimmick—that none of the women is in the same room with any of her sisters—makes the show very dialogue-heavy, which also means that nearly all the character development comes from what the sisters say to one another. You’ll get clues based on their costumes and the small spaces representing their homes, but most of it comes through their phone calls. And sometimes the conversations they have with others outside the family can be as revealing as those within the group. Aneece, played with subtle resolve by Andrade, shows her pain more when she talks with her soon-to-be-ex than with her sisters. Peggy’s revelations of her own dysfunctional relationship within the nuclear family tread on familiar ground.

“Belles: The Reunion” runs through July 14 at Limelight Actors Theater at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St., Gilroy. Tickets are \$25. For information, call 408.472.3292 or visit www.LimelightActorsTheater.com.

South Valley

'Belles' sequel arrives in Gilroy

<https://southvalley.com/belles-sequel-arrives-in-gilroy/>

By Susan Rife



PHONE SISTERS Christine Wanish, Christine McElroy, Rosalind Farotte, Donna Knippen, Betsy Andrade and Christy Wait form the cast of 'Belles: The Reunion.'

Limelight Actors Theater co-founder and director Kevin Heath often stumbles onto a script for the company while he's looking for something else. In the case of the company's summer show, *Belles: The Reunion*, Heath already had read the script and seen a production of the original show, *Belles*, written by Mark Dunn in 1988, but thought casting six women in their 20s and 30s would be too hard.

"I thought, 'Well, great script,'" Heath said.

Then in 2016 came the sequel, *Belles: The Reunion*.

"You know what? His writing had matured in the sequel, as did the characters. They're all within the age range where I have a plethora of actors to choose from," Heath said.

The show opens June 21 for four weekends at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, where patrons can create their own dinner show by bringing in a meal or ordering from nearby Milias Restaurant.

The comedy (with the necessary serious notes) puts the six Walker sisters from Memphis back into family crisis mode 25 years after the original show was set. Mom, now living in a nursing

home, has taken to stripping off her clothes in the community room. The sisters themselves have marital woes, financial setbacks and crises of faith.

The entire show takes place with the six sisters on the phone to one another.

“They are in six different locations. As a director, I thought, ‘This is really a good challenge for me. I have to get really creative. I can’t rest on my laurels,’” Heath said.

Each woman has a 4-by-8-foot rectangle of stage space in which to create her character.

“I pulled out some of the heavy hitters I’ve worked with for years,” said Heath, and he told them, “This is the project. It’s going to be very different from everything you’ve ever done.

“Everyone was up for the challenge,” he added.

Cast members Betsy Andrade, Rosalind Farotte, Christy Wait, Donna Knippen, Christine McElroy and Christine Wanish all knew one another or at least were familiar with one another’s work.

“There was immediate chemistry between the women,” Heath said. “They truly have become a family.”

The show requires some careful choreography since the interactions between the women are all on the phone.

“The choreography is much stronger and more important than in the average show,” Heath said. “First of all, you don’t have the whole stage to play with. You have to choreograph everything you’re doing to make it look natural, still give insights to your character and translate what’s going on in your life at this time.”

Then there’s the page of dialogue in which two pairs of sisters are talking to each other at the same time, in a careful dance of spoken and overlapping lines. And late in the show, all six sisters are on stage, with stage lights highlighting one pair and then another as they talk.

“We really did get an education with this script in a big way,” Heath said. “All six women have handled it beautifully. The collaboration between the six of them and myself, and the ideas, they took direction extremely well and took it to the next level. I just watched and said, ‘Wow.’”

“Belles: The Reunion” by Mark Dunn, performed by Limelight Actors Theater, runs June 21-July 13 at Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St., Gilroy. Tickets are \$25. For information, call 408.472.3292 or visit www.LimelightActorsTheater.com.