

Two local theater productions halted by COVID-19 are well worth your time

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By Camille Bounds

The pandemic harnessed our local theater activity, leaving patrons hungry to get out and see the great shows here. Two South Valley shows getting ready for takeoff in 2020 were forced to wait two years. They both opened May 6 and play for three weekends – and they’re worth the wait.

“Tigers Be Still” by Kim Rosenstock, directed by Andrew Cummings, is a comedy play about living with and trying to overcome frustration and depression. It follows the misadventures of young woman, “Sherry,” who finds herself moving back home with her dysfunctional family as she searches fruitlessly for a job.

Limelight newcomer Annalisa Tkacheff leads the cast with a sharp wit and indefatigable optimism much like the best comedians. You’ll be laughing hard at how she deals with the challenges life throws at her. “Tigers” is playing at the Limelight Theater in downtown Gilroy.

The venue’s unique staging set up where the audience sits around the stage moves the production at a swift pace. You can even order dinner and enjoy a meal before the show.



At the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, South Valley Civic Theatre opened the energetic “Newsies Jr.,” directed by Colleen Blanchard, with 32 teens putting on a delightful musical show about the historic newsboy strike of 1899.

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Both shows carry super casts and are well worth watching. It’s truly amazing that there is so much terrific talent in our area that can bring us quality theater productions.

Limelight's 'accidentally timely' show opens May 6

By: Erik Chalhoub April 28, 2022 <https://morganhilltimes.com/limelight-accidentally-timely-show-opens-may-6/>

Limelight by South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming comedy is about a family who is stuck in a rut and rarely gets out of their house.

It's a timely show that resonates with much of the cou

ntry, following two years of on-again, off-again pandemic lockdowns.

For the casual observer, it might seem Limelight chose "Tigers Be Still" to run at this point in its season all along, as a reflection on the state of the world.

Turns out, this show has been in the works long before anyone knew what "social distancing" was, or what the "COVID" acronym stood for.

"Tigers Be Still" opens May 6 at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St., and runs Fridays-Sundays through May 28.

Around 2019, Limelight founder Kevin Heath selected the show and had already found the cast. [But when Heath moved from the area](#) and South Valley Civic Theatre took over operations, the dates for the show changed, and many of the cast were unable to make those new dates because of prior commitments.

With a new cast, "Tigers Be Still" was meant to be Limelight's first show under South Valley Civic Theatre, with an opening date of March 20, 2020. However, after weeks of rehearsing, and only four days before opening, Limelight was forced to postpone the show as Santa Clara County had issued its first shelter-in-place order to combat the spread of Covid-19.

The third time must be the charm, and barring any unexpected catastrophes, "Tigers Be Still" will finally go live, this reporter confirmed.

"Tigers Be Still" follows Sherry Wickman, who recently earned a master's degree in art therapy, but is unable to find a job and has to move back home with her family. She must deal with her mother who won't come downstairs, her lazy sister and many other annoyances, capped off by a tiger that escaped from the local zoo.

"Tigers Be Still" originally opened in New York City in 2010, and was written by Kim Rosenstock, a writer for the Fox sitcom "New Girl."

Annalisa Tkacheff, who runs Silicon Valley Shakespeare as her day job, plays Sherry, calling the role the biggest she's ever had in her acting career. With only a cast of four, Tkacheff said she is rarely off stage for the duration of the show, describing it as a "marathon."

She said she is excited to be back in the theater, two years after first rehearsing for the show, shaking off the rust and "honing the craft."



Sarah Smith (left) as Grace and Annalisa Tkacheff as Sherry star in *Limelight* by South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming comedy, "Tigers Be Still." Photo: Andrew Cummings

"What Sherry and many of the characters are going through is super relatable after the Covid lockdowns," she said. "We were all depressed at some level. Being able to experience that through an artistic lens has been cathartic."

Director Andrew Cummings said that's exactly what he's been hearing from the cast, who continue to express how healing the rehearsals have been.

"We are all tired of what life has been like," he said, calling *Limelight's* performance "accidentally timely." "This particular show speaks to that feeling so clearly. That's been really fun to experience myself and go through with the actors."

Cummings said the cast and crew are in a unique position, as they are seeing the show and its characters through a much different lens than they had prior to the pandemic.

"They're trying to break out and turn over a new leaf," he said. "It resonates differently now that we've all kind of done that. It just seems so appropriate for this moment."

"It's hard to find a show that is both really meaningful and funny," Tkacheff said. "This is a happy blend of both, where you can walk away feeling uplifted but also feel like you've been touched in some way."

"Tigers Be Still" opens May 6 at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St., and runs Fridays-Sundays through May 28. For tickets, visit svct.org/2022_tigers.



Limelight's 'Tigers Be Still' entertains with woman's misadventures

Show is hilarious because it is all too real in dealing with life's disappointments

<https://gilroylife.com/2022/04/20/entertainment-limelights-tigers-be-still-entertains-with-womans-misadventures/>

By Marty Cheek

Lots of laughs will be heard at the Limelight Theater in downtown Gilroy as South Valley Civic Theatre opens the comedy play "Tigers Be Still" Friday, May 6.

"We are so pleased to kick off 2022 with this impactful and hilarious show," said the show's producer Robin Bezanson. "We have such an amazing cast who bring so much life and laughter to this play."

"Tigers Be Still" follows the misadventures of a young woman who finds herself moving back home with her dysfunctional family as she searches fruitlessly for a job.

Andrew Cumming directs the show.

Limelight newcomer Annalisa Tkacheff as "Sherry" leads the cast with a sharp wit and indefatigable optimism, Cumming said. "Like the best comedians, she's so, so smart, and she strikes a beautiful balance between Sherry's very real struggle and laughing so hard your sides hurt," he said.

Sarah Smith, as "Grace," is the play's wildcard. She caught her boyfriend cheating on her, and now she's mad, she's drunk, and she's ready for some mean karaoke.

"Sarah's genius is that she embodies the kind of unbridled rage we all wish we could unleash sometimes," Cumming said. "She's the comedic powerhouse of the cast, and I love how you never know what she's going to do next."

Gannon Janisch returns to Limelight as "Zack." The actor is hilarious, but his authenticity is what really shines, Cumming said. "He's just a normal kid who has experienced real tragedy, but that doesn't stop him from pushing Sherry's buttons and waxing poetic on why he loves working at CVS," he said.

Bruce Pember as "Principal Moore" is a Limelight veteran and audience favorite. "It's a pleasure to see a talented actor return again and again in different roles, and I think the audience is really going to love seeing yet another side of Bruce," Cumming said. "Somehow Bruce manages to squeeze the biggest laughs out of the darkest situations."

The show's story is about people stuck in a rut while being trapped in a house, he said. When the cast first rehearsed this play in preparation for a 2020 opening, they had no idea that they, too, would spend the next two years trapped in their homes with the pandemic, he said.



Photo courtesy Andrew Cummings Sarah Smith (left) as “Grace” rehearses a scene with Annalisa Tkacheff as “Sherry” in Limelight Theater’s “Tigers Be Still.”

“‘Tigers Be Still’ is hilarious because it’s all too real,” he said. “Having lived through COVID quarantines, we can all relate to how depressing that was. But we can also relate to how awkward, and hilarious, the first few steps back out of the house can be.”

The characters have been through dark times, but they are determinedly hopeful as they try to leave the nest, he said. The audience gets to laugh alongside them when things go awry.

“Of course, they don’t know they’re funny; but that makes it all the more hilarious,” Cumming said. “As our lead, Sherry, says: ‘I hope this will be an inspirational tale of triumph!’”

Cumming encourages people to attend the show because the magic of theater is all about taking the audience to new places, exposing them to different perspectives and lives they haven’t lived.

But, art is just as good when it helps people process and laugh about their own tough times. “Tigers Be Still” is laugh-out-loud funny because it helps audiences look right into the darkness and find a reason to laugh in its face, he said.

“For all of us on the cast and crew, this play has served as a sort of guide — a friend that has helped us mourn what we’ve lost while looking brightly toward the future,” he said. “We’ve all found that immensely healing, and we’re looking forward to sharing that with our audiences, too. As they say, laughter is the best medicine!”