

'Man of La Mancha'

The Dispatch Friday, January 30, 1981 C3

GCT schedules dinner show

GILROY — Don Quixote is about to start his quest again as Gilroy Community Theater rehearses for *Man of La Mancha*.

Performance dates for the group's fourth annual dinner show are Feb. 13-14 and 20-21 at St. Mary's Parish Hall, First and Monterey streets.

Curtain time is at 8 p.m., preceded at 6 p.m. by a catered dinner and a no-host bar featuring local wines.

Jim Barlow will portray Don

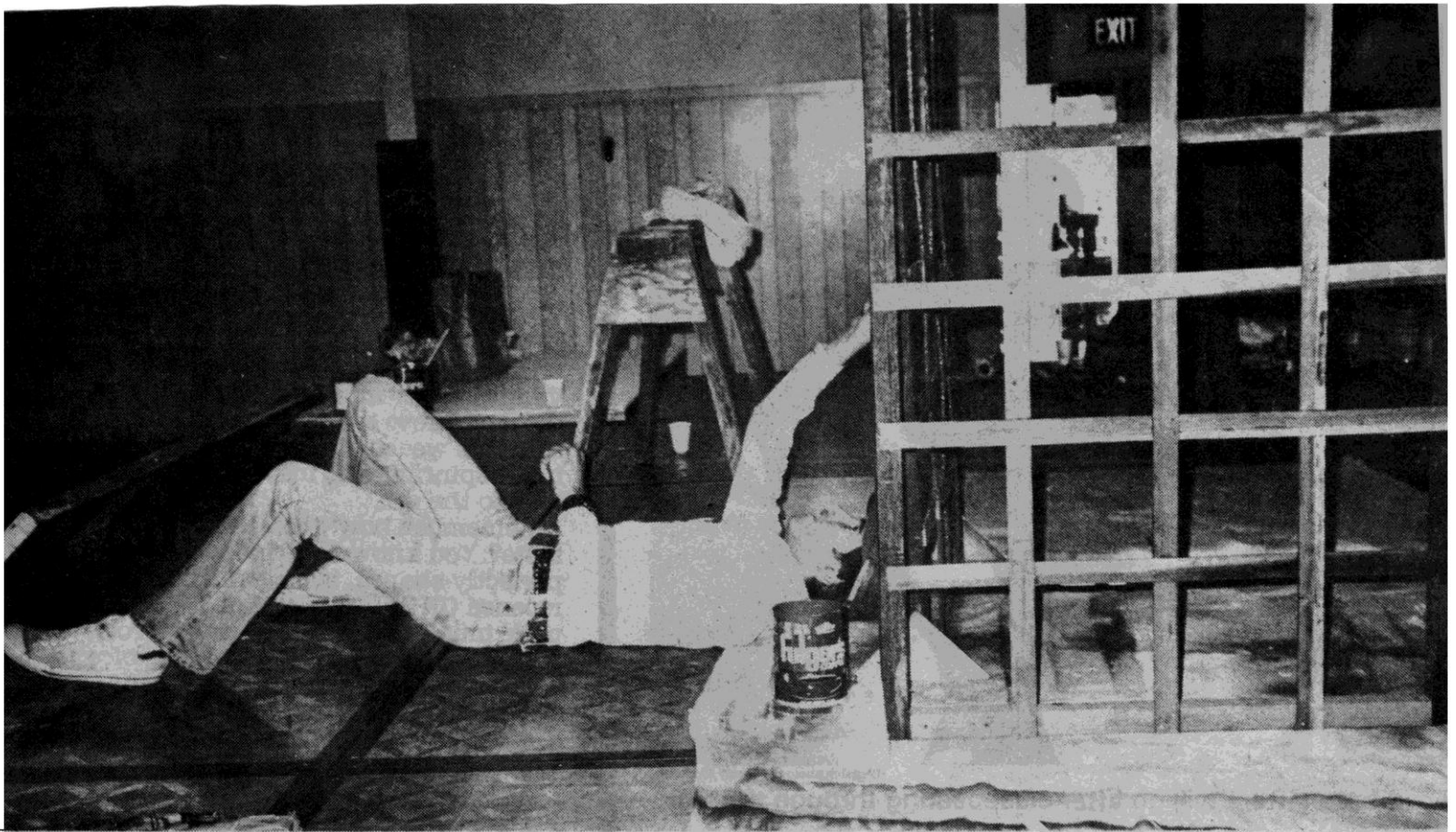
Quixote, with Richard Lewis as Sancho and Jannine Carrera as Aldonza.

MaryAnn Bruegmann is the director, Marilyn Guerin is the musical director and Debbie Nelson is the choreographer.

The supporting cast includes: Ted Weaver, Marty Pyle, Frank Vanella, Shelly Andrews, Darin Kerly, Shirley Little, Jerry Kocimieki, Jack Ray, Robert Levonius, Philip Spier, Karen Thorsen, Rick Torrez, Betty Cooper, Curtis Caudill and Al Bloom.

Past dinner shows have been sellouts, so interested persons are advised to obtain tickets early. No tickets will be sold at the door. For information or reservations, call 842-0828, 847-3220, 842-8677 or 842-7355.

Gilroy Community Theater has begun its 11th year, and this is the group's fourth annual dinner show. The first one was *I Do, I Do*, and the second was *An Evening with Rodgers and Hart*. Last year's dinner show was *Two by Two*.



Dispatch photo by Jo Anne Showalt

Setting the stage

Phillip Spier appears willing to go to any lengths to paint a set during move-in day for Gilroy Community Theater. All the effort was for the dinner-show, *Man of La Mancha*, which opens tonight

at St. Mary's Parish Hall on First Street in Gilroy. Performance will be repeated Feb. 20-21. For tickets, call 842-0828 or 847-3220.

2/13/81

'Man of Mancha' dinner show opening Friday

GILROY — While cast members sing and dance, others are preparing wine lists and getting ready to set up the tables for Gilroy Community Theater's production of *Man of La Mancha*.

Feb. 13 is the opening night for the musical, which stars Jim Barlow as Don Quixote, Richard Lewis as Sancho and Jannine Carrera as Aldonza. It will be repeated Feb. 14, 20 and 21.

St. Mary's Parish Hall, Monterey and First streets, is the location for the production. The play will begin at 8 p.m. following a catered dinner and no-host wine bar beginning at 6 p.m.

Tickets are available in advance only and may be reserved by calling 842-0828, 847-3220, 842-8677 or 842-7355.

The roast beef dinner will be catered by Frank Doyle of the Happy Stop. Other items on the menu are potatoes au gratin, green beans, carrots, rolls, butter, coffee and tea.

Louise Smith is dinner coordinator, a job she is staying to finish before moving to Tucson, Ariz. Assisting her is Martha Holder. Members of International Order of Rainbow for Girls will serve the meal. Wines from seven area wineries will be offered at the dinner and will be priced per bottle. Sandra Rapazzini is coordinating the wine list and setting up the wines. They will be served by community theater board members.

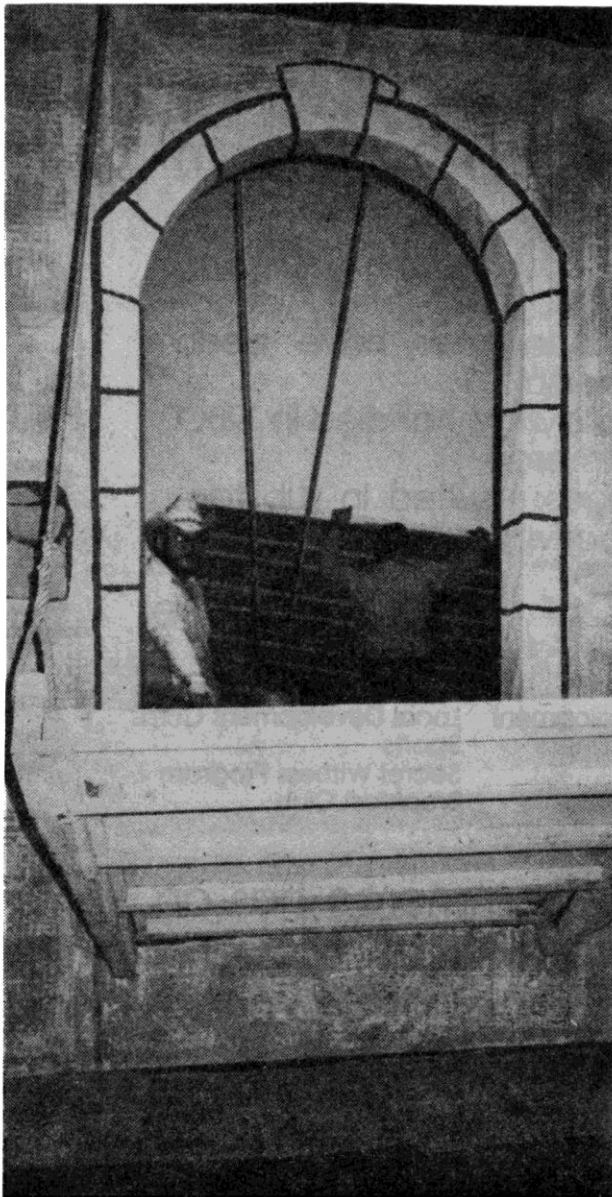
Participating wineries include Hecker Pass, Thomas Kruse, Fortino, Kirigin, Rapazzini, Emilio Guglielmo and San Martin.

Wineries were encouraged to be a part of the dinner-show Rapazzini said, because the wineries, too, are an art form.

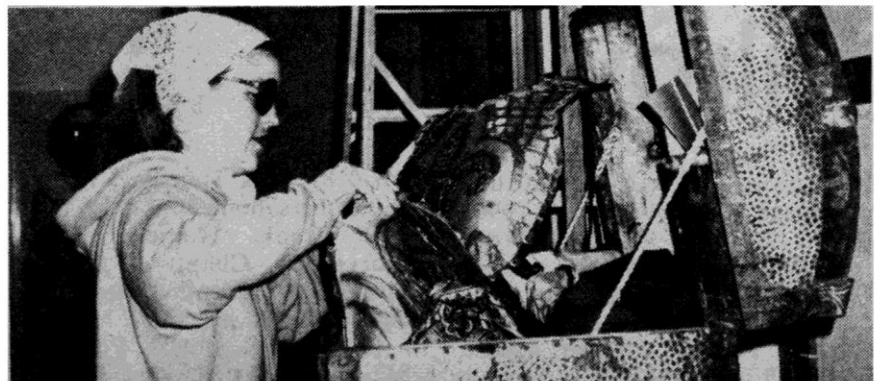
Those organizing the meal and those working on the play are pulling together as a family to produce the show, according to Rapazzini.

From audition to performance consumes about three months she said, with each person involved devoting about 25 hours a week. "It's like taking a part time job."

Family support is a must. "Understanding theater is a gift from your family if you are a theater addict, as some of us are," she added.



GCT sets an important scene.



Backstage work is part of the theater scene.

Vanella scores major triumph in GCT's 'Man of La Mancha'

By Joanne Rife
Special to The Dispatch

The opening night audience rose to its feet with a standing ovation at the conclusion of *Man of La Mancha*. A good part of the reason for that well deserved applause was Frank J. Vanella's magnificent portrayal of Don Quixote.

Vanella stepped into the role one week from opening and scored a major triumph. His voice is excellent, and the subtle changes in character as he moves from the poet Cervantes to the country squire Alonzo Quijana to the knight-errant Don Quixote were most impressive in this musical play within a play.

Gilroy Community Theater's annual dinner theater production is uneven, as most amateur productions are, but with Vanella in the lead it is strong enough to surmount those difficulties.

Certainly one of the reasons for the glistening response is the play itself and that extraordinary song, *The Impossible Dream*. Within the contest of the play it brought tears to my eyes, and to others in the audience. And why not? It represents to victory of idealism, an idealism in this society that is despaired of, in fact, laughed at, as we go about our little worries and our little lives. Here is a man who rises above sordid reality, who bears "with unbearable sorrow," who runs "where the brave dare not go."

And he is mad, insane. Yet one knows he is right and we are wrong. It is a call to the best that is in man, a call we are too fearful, too small, to answer.

Ah, but there are those who do answer, who come up out of their dung heap, and are transformed. As is Aldonza, the Dulcinea of Don Quixote's dream.

Jannine Carrera plays Aldonza, reaching beyond a voice that failed her periodically, to that transformation. Carrera is a fine actress, and took the part of the tough slut Aldonza as far as she could. The toughness is important, and she has it in the speaking parts, and in the songs until the higher registers, when the power leaves her and her voice grows gentle. But in the end, when she becomes the lady that Don Quixote dreamt her to be, then her voice is fine in that moment of mastery over everything she had been.

Don Quixote's other dreamer, Sancho, was played by Richard Michael Lewis, who played the part as though the character was Buddy Hackett, which is not a bad interpretation, if somewhat off-key. He is well cast, and yet faltered with a sense of unsureness, as though the character of Sancho fled ahead of him, one step, all the way.

Ted Weaver played the innkeeper with an extraordinary voice to hear in community theater. I left wishing the part had 15 more songs. He was a

pleasure to hear.

Shelly Andrews as Antonia the niece, and Marty Pyle as the housekeeper, were both very good singing the delightful song, *I'm Only Thinking of Him*. Another singer that arrested the attention was Robert Levonious as Anselmo, singing *Little Bird, Little Bird*.

The pace was excellent, courtesy of the director, MaryAnn Brueggmann. The play goes two hours without intermission and holds the attention all the while. Lighting, which could have been a problem on the improvised stage, was adequate and well designed. It could have been a disaster because of the incidental light in the parish hall, but the lighting, combined with the set, maintained the illusion. The set, by Ed Perkins, was plain, very austere, yet used as a prison, as an inn, and as the dusty land of La Mancha, all to good effect.

There was a rousing fight choreographed by Debbie Nelson.

Man of La Mancha starts off with a bang when Vanella sings *I, Don Quixote* and the wild winds of fortune take him whithersoever they blow. After that beginning, the play never deserts the audience as Miguel de Cervantes, who describes himself as an

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idealist, a bad poet and an honest man, takes his fellow prisoners on a voyage of the imagination that will lift them from their lives of despair and peril. "Facts are the enemy of truth," Don Quixote says as he sweeps them with him to do battle with a windmill, which he believes is the dark Enchanter; and finds an inn, which he thinks is a castle; and meets the slattern Aldonza, who he loves as a result of his quest, as Aldonza cries, You "rob me of anger and give me despair!"

And yet somehow, in the fact of the reality of death, the impossible dream triumphs.

Man of La Mancha won the 1966 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical. Richard Kiley took the lead in the part so ably done in Gilroy by Vanella.

If you would like a dose of hope, some rousing music, and a fine production, try GCT's *Man of La Mancha*. It continues Friday and Saturday at St. Mary's Parish Hall. Reservations required.

When the play hit Broadway it was met with raves, coming as it did in the middle of the '60's cynicism without relief, reflected on the stage and in society. That kind of cynicism and despair is with us today and perhaps explains the continuing appeal of *Man of La Mancha*. It tells us there is hope.

Dream almost became a nightmare

By Chuck Myer
Special to The Dispatch



Six hundred people gathered at St. Mary's Parish Hall during the last two weekends to eat a plate of roast beef, lean back in their chairs, sip a glass of wine, and watch one of the world's favorite musicals, *Man of la Mancha*, presented by the Gilroy Community Theater. Based on the Cervantes' classic *Don Quixote*, the musical tells the story of the legendary knight-errant using the play-within-a-play style. It takes a rockhard soul to remain unmoved throughout two continuous hours of the starry-eyed knight's renditions of such classics as *Dulcinea*, *I*, *Don Quixote*, and *The Quest* (more commonly known as *The Impossible Dream*).

The title role (actually a triple characterization of Cervantes, Quixote, and the ailing country squire, Alonso Quijana) as portrayed vibrantly by Morgan Hill resident Frank Vanella, who has been impressing South County audiences for half a decade in roles from Professor Howard Hill in *The Music Man* to the caliph in *Kismet*. Vanella's vocal abilities are enthralling, and it's easy to conclude that months of training went into his characterization.

A week before opening night Vanella hadn't the slightest idea he'd be appearing as Quixote. In fact, Vanella became the third actor to tackle the demanding triple role when Quixote Number Two, Jim Barlow, was sidelined with a form of laryngitis. *The Impossible Dream* was threatening to become a nightmare.

Director MaryAnn Bruegmann, no stranger to crisis situations, huddled with key staff and cast upon hearing the diagnosis by Barlow's doctor: he couldn't sing for three weeks. As in most community theaters understudies are a scarce luxury, and there were no other lunatic knights roaming through Gilroy waiting to be cast in the role. So she came up with a daring plan involving a quadruple cast switch. Vanella originally cast as the padre, was the only one with the experience to move up into the lead. Tenor Jerry Kocinski could easily handle Vanella's part, and dancer Curtis Caudill would assume Kocinski's role as the wandering barber. That left only Caudill's tricky muleteer role unfilled.

That's when the community theater spirit came full cycle. Barlow didn't have his voice, but he still had his body. So the former knight-errant quietly donned a muleteer costume, and the show went on.

That left only a week. Six days, really, since nothing short of a papal decree could uproot the Thursday night bingo game scheduled for the hall. Scenes were reblocked. Costumes were refitted. Vanella took time off work to learn the new dialogue and songs. By Wednesday night he was bringing tears to the eyes of the stage crew. And when the (imaginary) curtain went up Friday night on the finished product, who in the audience would have guessed four of the major roles were the product of only a week's time?

Chuck Myer is a member of Gilroy's city planning staff. His weekly column in The Dispatch focuses on the arts and cultural affairs in South County.

EVENING FREE LANCE Hollister

Thursday, February 19, 1981-

MAN OF LA MANCHA

"Man of La Mancha" opened to a full house last Friday night at St. Mary's Church Hall, First Street in Gilroy. The audience was enthralled by the acting and music which continued non-stop, without intermission. A lady seated at our table was brought to tears of emotion by the dramatic and beautiful ending.

This musical contained 21 songs; of particular beauty was "I'm Only Thinking of Him" and "Little Bird, Little Bird." Unfortunately, the musical accompaniment was a little rough.

Of special merit to the Gilroy Community Theatre production was the direction, choreography, lighting and set design, costumes and make-up.

Frank Vanella's performance as Don Quixote (Cervantes) was magnificent.

The play continues Friday and Saturday. The festivities begin with dinner at 6 p.m., followed by curtain call at 8 p.m. A \$12 donation pays for both. For reservations call 842-0828 or 847-3220.