

Fast FORWARD!

March 30 – April 6, 1989



'Chapter Two'
opens Friday

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Play combines comedy with heartbreak

'Chapter Two' challenges actors

By Veronique Mistiaen
Staff Writer

GILROY — George Schneider, a recently widowed writer, and Jennie Malone, an independent-minded actress who is recently divorced, sit next to each other in Malone's apartment. They sip wine. They're obviously nervous.

She asks him about the books he's writing; he compliments her wit. Both had assured their friends that they didn't want to date again.

Yet, here they are, meeting for the first time and feeling like teenagers on a first date.

"No matter how old we are, it doesn't get easier," George says.

"What doesn't?" Jennie asks.

"Mating," he answers, gloomily."

Neil Simon's "*Chapter Two*" (1977) which opens today at the Old City Hall Restaurant in Gilroy, deals with life, love and relationships. It's a comedy — but one with depth.

"It's a wonderful way to be entertained, and people will go away thinking about their lives," says Robin Stocks of Gilroy who co-produced the two-act comedy with her mother Hermie Medley.

After the production of the musical "*Babes in Arms*," a few weeks ago, the South Valley Civic Theatre wanted to present "something very different, something unique and in a more formal setting" says play director Marion Pintello of Gilroy, who works as an accountant during the day.

Members of the troupe wanted to produce an "adult play" they could present in a cabaret-type setting.

They settled for Simon's partially autobiographical comedy-drama about a writer who remarries after the death of his first wife. A Broadway playwright, Simon is probably the most commercially successful playwright in American theater history. His plays include "*The Odd Couple*" and "*The Gingerbread Lady*." He has written stories for musicals ("*Sweet Charity*" and "*They're Playing Our Song*.") He has also adapted several of his plays for motion pictures and written original film scripts ("*Murder by Death*, *The Goodbye Girl*.")

As for the setting of the play, the upstairs private dining room at the Old City Hall Restaurant seemed like a natural. "It's an attractive place and it's nice to bring the arts back to downtown," says Stocks, who works with the Hollister County office of education.

The set is composed of two apartments, George's and Jennie's. It is designed around the old judge's bench, a permanent fixture in the Old City Hall. Small tables for two to six spectators are arranged in front of the stage.

When the play opens George is back from Europe where he went to mourn the death of his beloved wife Barbara. "It's not true, she's not dead," he mutters.

His brother Leo desperately wants to cheer him up. He tries everything. "Make yourself some pocorn," he suggests. "Want to go to a dance?"

Never mind that his own marriage is in shambles, Leo also insists in finding the perfect date for

But after a first date arranged by Leo — a date with a jazzy-blond creature named Bambi, who looked like something out of *Star Wars* — George says "Thanks, but no."

In the other apartment, Jennie is also just back from Europe. Her long-time friend, the bubbly Faye Medwick, also insists on playing matchmaker. Her own marriage is not working too well.

By a strange twist, George and Jennie end up speaking over the telephone. George first calls her by mistake. He then calls back to apologize. Then again, just because he likes her voice over the phone. Jennie is annoyed at first. But, she is intrigued by George's candid attitude. They agree on a short meeting "just to look" at each other. And for both, it felt like bumping into an old friend.

Soon they are married. But second thoughts and difficulties emerge. They are so busy being in love that they don't communicate very well. George decides to leave for Los Angeles, but eventually comes back to Jennie.

In the meantime, Leo and Faye are trying to have an affair, but they are not too successful.

During a recent rehearsal, the four actors say that playing complex, intimate relationships is hard work and is sometimes emotionally draining.

"It's demanding for all of us."

Curtain call

What: Neil Simon's comedy-drama in two acts, "*Chapter Two*."
Presented by: South Valley Civic Theatre

When: Opens Friday at 8. Other performances April 1, 7, 8, 14 and 15

Where: Old City Hall Restaurant at the corner of Monterey Highway and 6th Street in Gilroy.

Tickets: \$8, and \$6 for senior citizens. Call (408) 842-SHOW. Tickets are also available at the door.

You have to really think about what's going on," says Betsy Andrade, who plays Jennie Malone. For example, she says, she cried backstage after having played a part in which she and George are fighting.

"I became that person," she explains. "It takes two to three hours to get rid of the character."

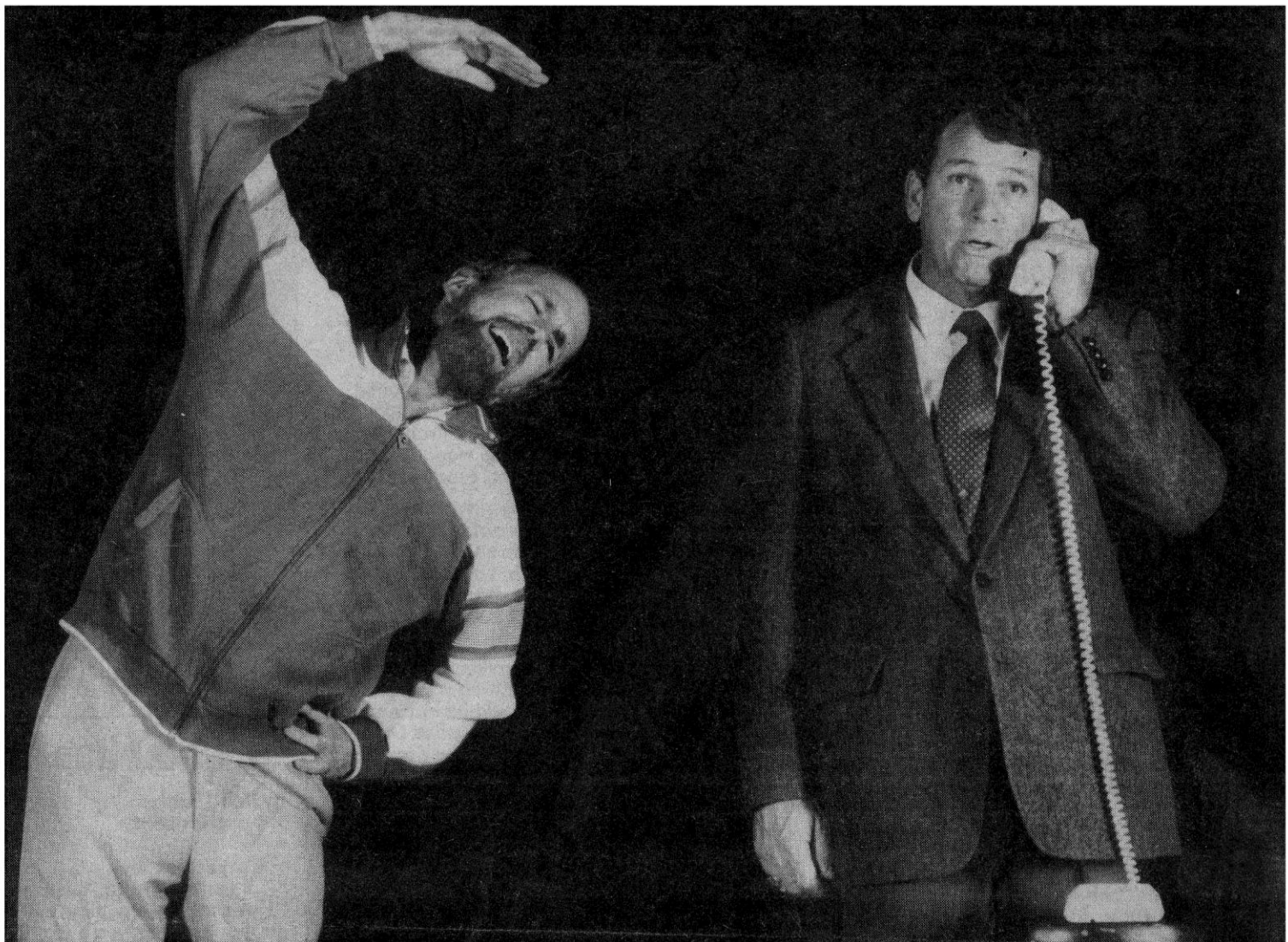
A Gilroy resident, Andrade does commercials and plays parts in a few films. "I love the character of Jennie," she says. "She's a lot of fun and she's very sure of herself. I like feeling that way because in real life I am not so sure."

John Fletcher, on the other hand, says he had no trouble understanding George's character. "I am very much like the character," says Fletcher, who is a Gilroy resident and works for PG&E.



Kory W. Hansen/Staff photographer

'Leo' dances with 'Faye,' played by Charly Bushauer.



'Leo,' played by Bill Corneth, listens to his brother 'George,' played by John Fletcher, trying to get rid of a persistent date.

“Chapter Two” at Old City Hall

By Jim Maya

Miracle Miles Correspondent

Last weekend, the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Neil Simon's "Chapter Two" opened at the Old City Hall Restaurant. The excellent dramatic comedy delighted the audience, including myself, the wife and the kids, Josh and Jessie.

First of all, I really like Neil Simon! I have always liked him! I know he isn't too popular with the critics and certain directors. The critics in general have had an open season on him for years, but I still think he is one of the great American playwrights.

I don't know that "Chapter Two" is one of his greatest, but it certainly is well written. The work combines touching humor with the profound pain brought on by the death of a mate.

"Chapter Two" started Simon on his autobiographical bent of recent years. The plot concerns a middle aged man, George (Simon), and his recovery from the death of his first wife, and his remarriage to an actress, Jennie (Marsha Mason in real life), and the difficulties that union suffered in it's early years. (She and Simon eventually divorced after the films "The Goodbye Girl" and "Chapter Two", in which she starred.)

The Simon and Mason characters were recreated by John Fletcher, of Center Stage fame, and by the local "Actress of the 80's", Betsy Andrade. Bill Corneth and Charly Bushauer complete the strong cast as George's brother, Leo, and Jennie's best friend, Faye. Faye and Leo develop their own sub plot.

I have been watching, directing and acting with Betsy Andrade for the last ten years, and in this play she has produced some of her most shining moments. I really believed her...It was as though she truly understood the pain and the joy of the new relationship. And she took the time to touch Simon's lines with the subtle shading they cry out for.

That's not to take anything away from the rest of the cast. John Fletcher also reached new artistic heights in this production. Though there were moments when he seemed to be reading the lines, rather than living them, several of his scenes were delightful. I especially liked the Act I "getting to know you" scenes. Both he and Andrade were warm, witty, and moving and controlled those scenes with near perfect timing.

Bill Corneth continues his local acting career with another fine performance. His Leo is the perfect contrast to brother George....Leo has several moral failings, holds his wife in low esteem, but is very funny. Corneth and Fletcher work very well together.

Charly Bushauer's characterization of Faye is the only one out of sync with the rest of the cast. Bushauer is an excellent actress, which she has demonstrated often on local stages. I don't feel her "overplayed" Faye blends with the other more realistic character interpretations by the rest of the cast. She does have tremendous energy and fine pacing, as usual, but I would have toned Faye down a bit.

Besides that one reservation I have with the character interpretation, my only other negative

comment would be about some momentary "reading" of lines. There were times throughout the play when I wanted to be given more time to think about and relish those great Simon lines. And I wanted to see the actors thinking and reacting within their characters, instead of concentrating on the lines. There were times I felt rushed, and that the actors were still reciting, rather than "living" the feelings and thoughts the lines expressed. There are comedies, even good comedies, where you don't need time to think, just react. Not so with "Chapter Two".

May I hasten to add that the problem was not a continuous one, and one that always lessens as community theatre actors work a show. Why, oh why, can't we open in Baltimore.

May I also hasten to add that the show has a professional look and feel, for which we may thank the tight direction of Marion Pintello. The acting is excellent...And there is a beautiful set which worked wonderfully well on the second story of the Old City Hall Restaurant. More shows there, please. The whole production has the feel of a class act, which is the result of an excellent production staff, in this case headed up by producers Robin Stocks and Hermie Medley.

Good show, folks! Not to be missed!

Jim Maya is a Theatre teacher at Gilroy High School, and writes for the Miracle Miles about theatre, the media, film, education, travel, and other current topics.