

SVCT's "Mame" is great!

By Jim Maya

Miracle Miles correspondent

I really wanted to get back from the great Northwest and our adventures in whale watching and house building in time for one of Gilroy's greatest hours, the South Valley Civic Theatre-Catholic Home Charities Homebound Senior summer musical benefit performance. In this case, Jerry Herman's "Mame."

The seniors loved it, my mother loved it, I loved it, and the cast loved it!

It should not go unnoticed that the cast loved their show, because that is often key to the success of a theatrical production. I talked to many of the cast as they stuffed themselves, along with the seniors, with ice cream after the show. The Sunday matinee was their third show in three days, but you could never tell it from their performance. There was a tremendous energy on the Gilroy High School stage that flowed from both a love of the play and their mission for the day, to entertain all those beautiful senior citizens attending that performance.

I think that the cast understood how important senior citizens are to our culture, and how often they are ignored and mistreated by the power brokers of that culture. Witness us spending billions in the Middle East to protect Arab dictators and international oil companies who don't give a rat's toot about the average citizen or the United States, while many, if not most, of our elderly live in poverty or right at the edge! The cast of "Mame" gave it their all and I couldn't have been more proud of my fellow artists and community members.

If the play had been average or worse, both SVCT and Catholic Charities still would deserve a thundering bravo! But the play was far above the average, and has received instant standing ovations after each show. It is excellent community theatre, both in concept and in execution, to the credit of director Don Porter and producer Marion Pintello.

Porter's large, beautifully costumed cast filled the far-too-wide though well lighted GHS stage most effectively, and was able to use the excellent Hal Lawrence/Marion Pintello sets with style and grace. In fact, from a technical view, the show worked as well as any in recent memory.

This is the first year that the summer musical

has been performed on the GHS stage, due to Gav's stage being down for renovation. Betsy Andrade, who looks ready to get back on stage after recently producing perhaps the world's most beautiful baby, was working the house Sunday afternoon. She made a comment about how wonderful it was to be able to hear everyone in the cast for the first time. Yes, you could and that was great.

Porter is a fine director. Usually I spend part of my audience time wondering why a director did this or didn't do that. Not so Sunday afternoon. Directing a large musical is one of the most difficult tasks in theatre, or any where, for that matter. (It rates up there with building your own house.) Don Porter's direction was wonderful!

Of course, he had an excellent cast to work with. I have written often of Ruth E. Mullins and what a fine actress she is. Her Mame did not let the audience down. Mame Dennis is the center of every scene when she is on stage, and if the actress is not up to that responsibility, the show doesn't work. This show works!

It works not only due to Ruth E.'s fine performance. She is surrounded by a strong, at times professional, cast that can not only act, but sing and dance as well.

The show starts with Mame's 10 year old nephew, Patrick (who in fact was a real person and wrote the novel "Auntie Mame," upon which the musical was based) and his nanny, Agnes Gooch, played by Samuel Sauer and L. Christine Amos, on the streets of New York City for the first time, on their way to live with Auntie Mame. Patrick's father has died and has left his son in the care of Mame.

The plot follows Mame, a beautiful, free thinking, loving, eccentric woman and her efforts to open the windows of the world to her charge, and Patrick from the end of the Roaring 20's through Patrick's adulthood.

Both Sauer and Matt Tidwell, as the older Patrick, are very strong in their roles. Tidwell is used through out the first act in a variety of minor roles. It would have been nice to have saved him for only the older Patrick role, but in community theatre when you have actors like Tidwell, or Whitney Pintello, or Gary Caswell, you use them, and the audience accepts the convention. Also, it doesn't help when some actors quit a show late in rehearsal,

but that's another story.

Amos is delightful as Gooch. She continues to blossom as both an actress and singer. Her voice continues to delight audiences and this critic!

As does Grace Brawn as Mother Burnside, Mame's Southern mother-in-law...She steals the end of Act I, the Peckerwood scene. It was the first time I have seen Grace on stage. More, Grace, more!

As does Simon Pintello, as Ito, Mame's house boy, who later in his life goes to work for the Green Hornet...

As does the chorus and featured dancers...This is most ambitiously choreographed show in memory, to the credit of Mellisa Draper...

As did Steve Johnson, and Mandy Duarte, and Steve Perez, and Rod Pintello, and Louise LaDuke and Denee Lewis and Yolanda Cotterall and Judy Hetzel and Carol Harris, and the wonder Chris Stebbins costumes and so many others. Yes, too numerous to mention.

For the one gentleman who sat in front of me and didn't seem to be enjoying himself, I assume that you're wife is divorcing you, or something else of that magnitude is happening. If, on the slight chance that you really didn't enjoy the show on it's own merits, please remember that this is community theatre. And yes, not ALL the cast are seasoned performers. That, Sir, is what it is all about! And you always have a dancer here, or a singer there or an actor who might be off a bit. But there are very few in this cast of citizen performers. What a shame that you couldn't have looked upon the show from that perspective.

"Mame" is excellent theatre and I hope the audiences continue to be large for their remaining two weekends of Thursday, Friday and Saturday night performances, the 16th through the 25th. Call 842-SHOW for reservations.

OK...Tony helped.

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