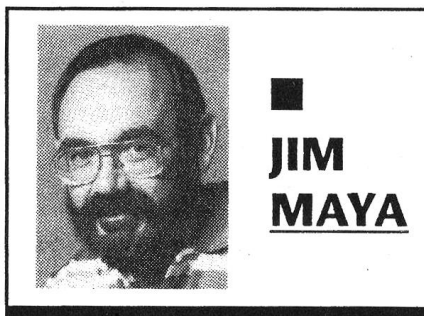


# Behind the scenes in 'Philadelphia Story'

**"T**he Philadelphia Story" is going to be a charmer. The South Valley Civic Theatre production, which opens tomorrow night for a three-week run, is right in the middle of dress week, and showing great promise. We are looking forward to opening weekend for several reasons.

First of all, when was the last time you even had the opportunity to see this American classic? Dialogue from the play fills every drama scene book, and there are many of us still around who remember the wonderful Hepburn-Grant-Stewart film. And yet I can't remember the last time it was being produced anywhere close.

Secondly, the cast and crew themselves are delightful local theater persons. Last weekend was the big set construction effort. Producers Joyce Pagan and husband John, and Deborah Schwarz (mother of this column's name) and head set-construction person, Don Hayes, were buzzing here and there, producing, hammering and head setting, or set heading.



## IN MAYA 'PINION

The director, Marion Pintello, and husband, Rod, were busy painting. And many of the actors, some of the finest in the area and some of the newest, got in theiricks as well. Pintello's daughter, Whitney who plays the female lead, was there cleaning up dressing rooms. Steve Filice, Steve Beck, Mark Staben and Bill Corneth, all actors, were there painting and nailing. I love it when actors show up for set building and strike.

**R**emember that in community theater you all are more than welcomed to get involved. You don't have to audition in order to build sets.

Let me mention Don Hayes for a moment. Don is a fine

actor, as his roles in Center Stage and SVCT shows have demonstrated. In "Philadelphia Story" he has a minor role on stage, but has a major behind-the-scenes role as head of set construction.

He was on the job at 7 a.m. Saturday and by Sunday afternoon was feeling a bit overwhelmed. You see, this was his first time in such a role. Isn't community theater great? Where else do you get chances like that? And when you see the play and its beautiful set, know that Don Hayes built it ... with a little help.

Newcomers to the stage, though not to the local theater scene, are Gayle Montalvo and Karen Rizzi. Yes, it will be their first time ever on stage after all those years of being stage mothers to Sabrina and Erica.

Both Gayle and Karen are well known as producers behind the scenes, and now, in front of the scenes. I saw them rehearse Monday night and they were both dynamite. Karen commented that it always looked so easy for something that is so hard.

You can make reservations by calling 842-SHOW. Curtain is at 8 p.m. at the Gilroy High School Theatre.

## THEATER

# Of high society, cynicism, and a search for love

By WALLACE BAINE

Staff Writer

Despite its intriguing title, "The Philadelphia Story" has little to do with brotherly love or Ben Franklin's hometown. It is a story instead of class jealousy, of father-daughter estrangement, of yellow journalism and one young woman's search for love.

The latest production from South Valley Civic Theatre is the stage rendition of the popular 1940s screen classic of the same name starring Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant and Jimmy Stewart.

The Lords are a wealthy, aristocratic family from you-know-where. Daughter Tracy (Whitney Pintello) is about to be married for the second time. Her father (Bill Corneth) is involved in a shady illicit relationship with a New York dancer and may not make it to the wedding. As if this confusion weren't enough to unravel Tracy's matronly mother (Mary Burton), her brother Sandy (Steve Filice) shows up with the news that a reporter and a photographer from a questionable publication are house guests for the weekend and will be attending Tracy's wedding to up-from-the-bootstraps businessman George Kittedge (Steve Beck).

Finally, to make the mess as awkward as possible, Tracy's mischievous teenage sister Dinah, played by Ellen Wood, invites Tracy's ex-husband C.K. Dexter Haven over for lunch on the big day.

Desperate to cover up her father's shameful behavior, Tracy concocts a masquerade for the reporters. Tracy's Uncle Willy becomes her father, until Seth, her real father, shows up unexpectedly.

Whitney Pintello is the central character of the show, playing Philadelphia society doyenne Tracy Lord. Tracy spends a lot of stage time hearing from various characters about her own personal failings. Her father, finance, ex-husband and the reporter all take shots at her.

Whitney, like her father Rod, her mother Marion and her brother Simon, is a familiar face to local theater fans. In this production, however, she is given front-and-center attention and she performs with a dizzy, frantic charm.

Larry Carr is Macaulay "Mike" Connor, the hard-edged reporter who writes "cheap stuff for expensive magazines." Connor and photographer Liz Imbrie (Rosie Ferdin) show up at the Lords' with a lordly disdain for all they stand for. The two are working on an ambitious project they call "the Philadelphia story." The final segment of the series of articles is to be a look into Philly's high society. It is a story that neither the journalists nor the Lords are particularly excited about.

Carr and Mark Staben — who plays the acid-tongued, but big-hearted Dexter Haven — are the show's strongest actors. Carr is terrific as the snarling, arrogant young writer who carries a Jeffersonian contempt for the trappings of the rich and famous. Staben's timing is impeccable in a demanding role.

In the play's early going, there is no apparent rhyme or reason for the ex-husband's presence. Staben has the ability to come off as relaxed and natural in a situation that is neither.

Veteran actor Hal Burton is around also as the boozy Uncle Willy, the Lord family eccentric always holding a glass of something and dressed in an outfit that is the epitome of 1940s bad taste.

As usual, the South Valley Civic Theatre does the little things well. The set and costumes are stunning and Marion Pintello's direction keeps the action snappy.

"The Philadelphia Story" is an engaging tangle of characters with clashing attitudes on life, love and money.

The script's strength lies in how all of these different elements meld together to make an engrossing story — whether you're from Philadelphia or not.



LISA M. BROWN/Staff Photographer

**Uncle Willy (Hal Burton) and Dinah (Ellen Wood) discuss the press.**



**JIM  
MAYA**

## **IN MAYA 'PINION**

I must admit that I went to "The Philadelphia Story" worrying about the length of the play and whether it was going to be dated. That length is now perfect after some scene cutting by director Marion Pintello.

It is a bit dated, no longer shocking as it once was. Though still a charming comedy, a little off-stage skinny-dipping with the wrong man the night before the wedding and Daddy's forgiven affair no longer shock us as it might have in 1940. You must also listen to the lines, not always necessary in some modern productions.

With a couple of exceptions, the cast is strong. Lead character Tracy Lord, of the filthy rich Philadelphia Lords, is played by Whitney Pintello. Her rich, headstrong, and initially shallow though beautiful Tracy works very well. Whitney is an excellent actress, as her work last Saturday demonstrates, but I do wish that she had taken more time with her transitions. Tracy is the character who changes, and those "awakenings" seemed rushed to

She has several men in her life: Her ex, Dexter, is wonderfully played by an outstanding newcomer, Hollister resident Mark Staben. His Dexter is self-assured, never awkward, and has a charismatic quality so necessary for the role. My wife says all you ladies will love him.

Tracy is engaged to a stuffy, arrogant George Kittredge, well played by Steve Beck. Her father is well played by Bill Corneth, who also looks perfect for the role. Her uncle is the adorable Hal Burton, her cute brother is local banker Steve Filice and her enamored swimming partner is first-time actor (and as a result a bit awkward at times) Larry Carr. All of them were enjoyable, and the Carr-Pintello kiss was the most convincing you will ever see on stage.

Tracy has several women in her life: Little sister Dinah is played by another delightful newcomer, 12-year-old Ellen Wood. She charmed the socks off the audience. Mary Burton's Mother Lord is also wonderful.

Janet Espinosa, Joyce Carr, Karen Rizzi, Gayle Montalvo, Rosie Ferdin, Don Hayes, and Carl "One Line, One Laugh" Crossley complete the cast.

The sets and costumes were excellent by any community theater standards. I liked it. Call 842-SHOW.

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