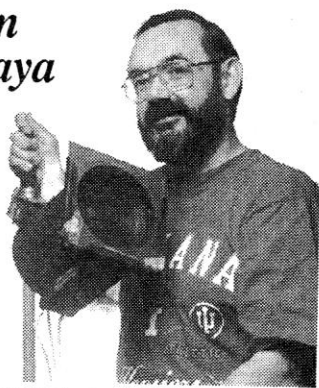


SVCT play took shape in late stage

Yes! It is Summer! Praise be! Since we'll be out of town, (Yes, it's that time of the year again... We're heading out to the Ashland, Ore., Shakespeare Festival, Portland, Seattle, The San Juan Islands, Puget Sound, the Canadian Rockies, Yellowstone, Glacier Park ... You know, the typical "teacher" summer. (And yes, you will hear all about it in the next few weeks.) I won't have a chance to see the latest South Valley Civic

**Jim
Maya**



Theatre production, but I went by the South Valley Playhouse in Morgan Hill last week to write this sort of preview/review. Co-Producers Patt White and Cindy Hoffman said it was OK after I told them that being a director myself, I know how things sometimes look two nights before opening, and would be "farsighted."

The play is "Sam's Alcazar Chateau Gambling Palace Caper," and I didn't need to be "farsighted" at all. Okay, the paint buckets were still out, and several workers were painting decorations on the wall of the Casino. Yes, director Russ "The Legend" Hendrickson was still stopping the run through here and there for brief moments to rearrange little bits of blocking.

On the other hand, the play was moving smoothly, everyone was in nicely-done costumes, no lines were being called for, and some fine character acting was taking place. In fact, I was most impressed with both the

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Madeline Hattiere (Patt White) says goodbye to ObersiLeutnant von Strutz (Dick DeBolt).

readiness factor and the show itself.

I know. I've never heard of "Sam's Alcazar..." either. You might call it a spoof of the classic Bogart-Bergman film "Casablanca." Remember? Instead of Rick's place it's now "Sam's," as in "Play it again, Sam." Get it?

In fact, many of the characters in "Sam's Alcazar..." are "Casablanca" caricatures. Remember the Claude Rains role of the French inspector? In "Sam's Alcazar ..." the role is now Inspector Cloissone. It does sound suspiciously "Pink Panther-ish," and not by accident. There is a lot of lampooning in "Sam's Alcazar..."

Geoff Dyer plays Cloissone, and is smashing. Dyer was born in England, which is always an advantage when you're an actor.

The other characters in this mystery farce have terrific, funny names. Stay with me. There is Sam Sonata, Horace Hope and Madeline Hattiere (White). Then there is ObersiLeutnant Von Strutz, complete with moniker and a single, black, "Dr. Strangelove" sort of glove, Leutnant M. Heinz, and Marcia Heath. (They're played by Dick DeBolt, Larry Carr, and Debbie Baptista, respectively).

It gets better. Marion Pintello and hubby Rod were hysterical as the rundown cleaning lady spy, Sonia Dupevsky, and Herr Jacob Gottroksmann, a little old hot gem

salesman (Got rocks? Get it?). Then there are Bill Corneth, Cheryl Witmer, Debi Pfeffer and Marie Jeanne Albanese, who play Sir Hartley Worthit, Melody Hapsody, Lorna Lotte, and my favorite name, Anna Marie Fettucine, who has a couple of kids, Mack and Ronny.

As for the set, its execution and concept are fabulous. One of the most interesting developments in local theater is the evolution, if I may, of SVCT's South Valley Playhouse as a "space." "Sam's Alcazar..." goes beyond theater in the round. The "space" is filled with small tables, and the show takes place in, around, and about the audience's tables. There is also a new look to the entrance of the theater, and the foyer has been converted to a gaming room, that will be functioning before and after the show, and at the intermissions.

I asked who really designed the set and Hendrickson told me it was done kind of by committee. Remembering a camel is a horse designed by a committee, I suspect old Russ is really the mastermind behind it all.

As I said, I was impressed.

"Sam's Alcazar..." runs through July 9. Details: 842-SHOW.

Jim Maya teaches drama at Gilroy High School. His column appears each week in Let's Go!

'Sam's Alcazar' a theatrical happening

By PAUL MYRVOLD
Special to LET'S GO!

"**S**am's Alcazar Chateau Gambling Palace Caper," the latest offering of South Valley Civic Theatre, bills itself as "A Mystery in Three Acts." Although there is a mystery and there are two intermissions, the production bears little resemblance to a true play. As presented by the Civic Theatre, "Sam's Alcazar..." written by Katie Lavender Hassett, is instead an entertainment potpourri of pleasant diversions woven together to provide an amusing evening. Director Russ Hendrickson overcomes a weak script by creating a theatrical happening that is part murder mystery, part cabaret, part "Las Vegas Night" fund-raiser, part audience participation game show.

The entire space of the Civic Theatre's Playhouse is given over to the performance. Gaming tables have been set up in the lobby area and mezzanine and audience members can try their luck at roulette, craps, and blackjack before the show and at intermissions. Upon entering, an audience member receives a program cleverly disguised as a passport which must be stamped by glowering gendarmes who give patrons the arched eyebrow as they enter. In an element that adds immeasurably to the fun of the show, cast members in character mingle freely with audience before the performance as well as at intermissions in a sustained improvisation.

Once into the scripted portion of the performance, the audience discovers that "Sam's Alcazar..." shamelessly rips off of the beloved film "Casablanca." This is satirical spoof that plunders the famous cinema icons created by Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Claude Rains and company and creates a murder mystery that spends a bit too much time on exposition and not enough on action. In this version, as in the film, a Moroccan night club circa 1940 provides the setting and characters for the amusingly nefarious deeds. Oddly, in this version Sam owns the night club and Rick plays the piano.

When a couple of British agents are murdered, the mystery solving begins. Since this is spoof satire, the characters have

cuute names. The doomed MI-6 agent — Bill Corneth in a dryly amusing performance — is Sir Hartley Worthit. The other agent, disguised as the Arab Abdul (Larry Carr) is called Horace Cope.

The victims, especially Hartley Worthit, deserve to die and virtually every other character (the "usual suspects") has motive and opportunity. This motley band of spies, refugees, Nazis and French Moroccan police are brought to life with a stunning array of infectious accents. We have French, German, Russian, Italian and several varieties of British. In one of the best musical numbers of the evening, Cheryl Witmer as Melody Hapsody, gives us the amazing rendition of the old Andrews Sisters hit "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" with a Cockney accent. Dick De Bolt as Oberleutnant Von Strutz and Larry Carr as his assistant Leutnant M. Heinz look and sound suitably Teutonic. Geoff Dyer as Inspector Prefect Cloisonne has an accent and demeanor thick and consistent enough to spread on a croissant. Rod Pintello is always fun to watch on stage and doesn't disappoint us as Jacob Gottroksmann (a refugee trying to sell his "family jewels" to buy exit visas), a character who conveys his loathing of Nazis with a hawk and a spit.

Perhaps the most thorough character work of the evening belongs to Marion Pintello as

Sonja Dustevsky, a Soviet spy disguised as a charwoman. With wonderful concentration, she stays impeccably in character at all times and gives the most realistic performance of the evening.

Sam (the Bogart role, ably delivered by Steve Beck) performs more as an M.C. than as an active participant. He talks to the audience, introduces acts and in general acts as the evening's overseer.

Interspersed in the action of the play are various musical acts. Simon Pintello tangos with Dia Hoshida, Mitzi Imagawa taps, and Karri offers authentic belly dancing. Greg Harsh's superb piano playing provides musical continuity and when Sam says, "Play it again, Rick," delivers a softly touching rendition of "As Time Goes By."

"Sam's Alcazar..." is in-your-face-theater. The performers flirt with the audience, talk to them, sing to them, and play their scenes in and around them. The audience is rewarded with a raffle for those who buy gambling chips as well as a prize for the best solution to the whodunit.

Take the kids. My son (8-year-old Alex) accompanied me and had a ball playing roulette. All those years of playing Clue paid off for him, he guessed the murderer correctly and I, well, I was clueless.

Not a play, not a musical, just an evening of fun. A good time was had by all.



JENIFER LAPOLLA/Staff Photographer

Oberstleutnant von Strutz (Dick DeBolt) tries to convince Inspector Prefect (Geoff Dyer) that Germany will rule all of France while Madline Hattiere (Patt White) looks on.