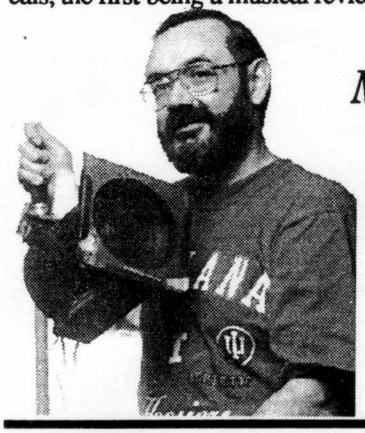
SVCT show a special treat for holidays

Last Friday we got to see another holiday theatrical treat, in this case the latest South Valley Civic Theatre dinner production, "A Day In Hollywood...A Night in The Ukraine."

The show is actually two one-act musicals, the first being a musical review of



Jim Maya

some of the great songs of Hollywood performed by ushers at Graumann's Chinese Movie Theatre.

The second is a takeoff on one of the old Marx Brothers comedies of the 1930s, based very roughly on Anton Chekhov's play, "The Bear." Like they say on the program, a musical double-feature.

"Hollywood," directed by Carol Harris, is just wonderful, and I'm not a big musical revue fan. It has the best dancing, with choreography by Harris and Jenny Brawn, that I've seen in the South Bay for a long time. It has a very strong cast who all have at least adequate to excellent voices, something not all community theater musicals have in common. The set, designed by Grace and Jenny Brawn, is creative and well executed. It has excellent costumes by Judy Scagliotti and Debi Pfeffer. And the duo of accompanists, Milissa Rowen and Mark Gaetano, were absolutely professional. The show is fast paced, energetic and entertaining.

The cast, Lawrence Arias, Jennifer Brawn, Michael Gray, Christine McElroy, Carol Harris, Ruth E. Mullins, Chris Souza and Charles Keith-Stanley worked so well with each other, especially as a tap line for the very witty "The Production Code."

Other songs? How about a touching "Thanks For the Memories," and others like "Ain't We Got Fun," "Sleepy Time Gal," "Cocktails for Two" and "Two Sleepy People."

I was especially impressed with Jennifer



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South Valley Civic Theatre's annual dinner production boasts numerous stage and production talent.

Brawn. She certainly has matured as a performer and technical artist. Jenny is one of those theater kids I watched grow up on local stages, and it's a special pleasure to see her as such a talented young woman back hoofing it on the SVCT boards.

Speaking of special pleasures, Act II picked up right where Act I left off.

A few of us remember the Marx Brothers with fond memories. I was amazed at Keith-Stanley's Groucho, Arias' Chico Marx, and especially Harris' Harpo.

You remember Harpo, the curly headed brother with the horn who never spoke?

I mean to tell you, no one nowhere has ever come closer to Harpo than Harris does.

I mean, like, is there anyone more talented in these here parts than Harris? She excels as a music teacher, theatrical director, choreographer, visual artist, accompanist, dancer, singer actor and grandmother, to mention a few of her talents.

An artist of amazing energy, Harris has at times in the past overwhelmed her character with that very energy. Not that Gino/Harpo is the perfect part for Harris, but I do think this role calls for an actor with Harris' vibrancy and charisma. It is a masterful performance!

And yet as strong as Harris' performance is, she does not overwhelm the rest of the cast in this rendition of classic film farce.

Mullins' Mrs. Pavlenko, a rich widow to be wooed and won by Stanley's Groucho/Samovar, is also marvelous.

A Day in Hollywood A Night in the Ukraine

Dates: Dec. 17-18, 31
Where: South Valley Civic Theatre playhouse, 235 Tennant Station, Morgan Hill
Times: 7 p.m., followed by show at 8. The play consists of two hour-long acts with an intermission
Tickets: $28
Details: 842-SHOW.

Pavlenko is a terrible singer. Any actor can sing terribly. Few sing as well as Mullins, so that when she sings terribly, it's really entertaining. Do you know what I mean?

And only a step behind are Brawn, Arias, Gray, McElroy and Souza.

If I might slip a couple of slight negatives, amid all the rest of my superlatives, it would be that at times the pace fell off a bit in Act II. Also, Keith-Stanley slipped in and out of his Groucho.

Act II co-directors Rosalind Farotte and Betsy Andrade have fashioned a delightfully funny and clever parody of a wonderful genre from the bygone glory days of American film history.

Produced by Gayle Montalvo and Melinda Hollis, this latest SVCT diner show, catered by the Good Food Company of Morgan Hill, and graciously served by theater members, is a fine evening of hilarity and nostalgia. It would make a wonderful gift for the holiday for anyone. It was for me.

The production continues through the Gala New Year's Eve show. Call 842-SHOW for more reservations and information.

And before I say good night, let me encourage you to see the Live Oak Drama Guild's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Friday and Saturday It's beautifully mounted, with great sets and costumes, and some fine acting. Director Bill Klipstine and company have put together a show to be proud of. ■

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