

SOUTH VALLEY CIVIC THEATRE'S MOON OVER BUFFALO

The scene is set in 1953 Buffalo, New York, where fading, fiftyish stage stars George and Charlotte Hay (**Tom Hepner** and **Rosalind Farotte**, two of Our Valley's best actors) and their company are touring the hinterlands headlining *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Private Lives* in repertory. But the audiences are staying home to watch *Captain Video* and *Mr Peepers* on their 10 inch Muntz TVs and the company hasn't made payroll in two weeks. The legitimate theatre is on the ropes incapable of competing with both movies and the endless stream of TV entertainment.

The Hays' daughter Rosalind (a totally charming **Allyson Finn**) has brought her erstwhile fiancé—a hapless, insecure, star-struck nebbish of a TV weatherman named Howard

(**Peter Mandel** in a perfect, patented performance) — to meet her parents, but her jilted lover, a manically enthusiastic young thespian named Paul (breathless, amiable **Lane Grover**), wants to reunite. The company's ingénue Eileen (a delightfully comic **Elena Grover**) provides the spark that ignites the fuse of farcical disaster when she reveals the consequences of an amorous dalliance with George. Grandma Ethel (played for maximum dottiness by **Carol Harris**) uses her deafness like a club on the other characters while playwright **Ken Ludwig** (*Lend Me a Tenor*, *Crazy for You*) uses it to stir the pot and muddle the plot. Lawyer Richard (a per-

fectly cast **Bill Corneth**), in love with the mercurial Charlotte, functions as the farce's straight man.

And the VIP? Film director Frank Capra looms large and unseen over the plot as he travels to from Hollywood to see if the Hays are suitable replacement stars for his latest film after Ronald Coleman breaks both legs and Greer Garson walks off.

In *Moon Over Buffalo*, as in all good productions of good farce, the entrances and exits through the set's five door are timed to the split second, identities are mistaken, misguided characters make unfortunate choices which all leads to laughter — enthusiastic, raucous laughter on opening night.

Moon Over Buffalo continues through September 11 at the Playhouse in Morgan Hill.

The comedy *Moon Over Buffalo*, **South Valley Civic Theatre's** latest production opens at The Playhouse in Morgan Hill on August 20 and continues through September 11. The show is an onstage/backstage comedy about George and Charlotte Hay, a middle-

aged theatrical couple nearing the end of their careers playing stock plays in third rate towns with all the attendant odd balls and situations that the finest farce requires. Can't wait!

SVCT's 'Moon Over Buffalo' in Morgan Hill

Gilroy Dispatch

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Chris Riley



Rosalind Farotte and Tom Hepner play Charlotte and George Hay, who in turn play characters in *Cyrano de Bergerac* in South Valley Civic Theatre's play within a play "Moon over Buffalo."

Morgan Hill – The South Valley Civic Theatre company is set to start its 2004-2005 season on Friday with Ken Ludwig's comedy farce, "Moon Over Buffalo."

The production is SVCT's kick-off of 10 performances through Sept. 11 at the Morgan Hill Community Center.

"Moon Over Buffalo" is a play about a play. It involves a theatrical family who lives in Buffalo, New York in 1953, right around the time that stage actors began to compete with television.

Leading the charge into each laugh is Charlotte Hay, played by Rosalind Farotte, and her husband George, played by Tom Hepner. George operates a community theatre that is on its last legs.

The Hays' love of acting has brought them close to making it big in the movies. But, they are not too happy about almost making it big. They refuse to give up and continue performing daily shows of the plays "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "Private Lives."

The plot thickens when noted Hollywood director Frank Capra is expected to be in the audience for the next show, searching for a cast member for a new movie.

In the Hays' race to make the most of their last chance for stardom, chaos prevails. Charlotte's appearance is in question because she may just run off with her agent. George's appearance is in question because he may not be sober enough to remember his lines. And Capra's appearance is just plain in question, as is the show he may see – either of the two the cast has been performing, or possibly a wacky mixture thereof.

Hepner, who has been involved with SVCT for more than 20 years said the eight actors in "Moon Over Buffalo" are having a great time, despite being in their rehearsal crunch time.

Both Spencer and producer Maria Haluza agreed that things get a little hairy the week before opening night.

"This is when we rehearse in full costumes and makeup," Haluza said.

"Next week is our last week, 'hell week,' we call it," said Kae Jenny Spencer, one of the producers who is also the stand-in director for her husband Steve who is traveling. Spencer said she is excited because this is the first play she has directed after years of working behind the scenes.

The week before dress rehearsal, the actors and crew members bring in the stage props and set up the lighting and sound.

The painting and construction of the set was done by the volunteer members of SVCT at a warehouse in Gilroy.

"The hardest part is transporting the set," Haluza said.

The cast includes the Hays' relatives and others caught in their zany orbit.

Allyson Finn plays the Hays' only child, Rosalind, who, after performing in one too many family productions, turned to a career in advertising. Finn's theatrical parents insist on her taking a role in the play, "Private Lives" when she returns home with her new fiancé.

Peter Mandel plays Howard the fiancé, who is also a weatherman.

Almost deaf Granny Ethel, played by Carol Harris, was once an actress, too. Now, Granny is the confused costume mistress for this family theater troupe. She is full of puns and jokes revolving around misinterpreted commands.

"I get to be crotchety all the time and I think that's fun," said Harris.

Lane Grover plays Paul, Rosalind's former beau, who still yearns for her. Paul is the charming "jack of all trades" for the Hays.

Elena Grover plays Eileen, whose mood swings might have something to do with George.

Grover said that she got into acting because she wanted to see more of her husband, Lane who was always out late rehearsing for plays.

Bill Corneth plays Richard, and said that although his role is not a big one, his love interest in one of the characters is hilarious when she attempts to overcome her own betrayal. Corneth was pleased with the cast.

"This group has exceptional talent and love for the community theater," he said.

Spencer said the play's comedic enjoyment is not for everyone. It contains mild adult language and is recommended for teen and adult audiences. The play runs approximately two hours.

"Moon Over Buffalo" tickets are \$15.00 for students and adults, \$12.00 for seniors. The weekend shows start at 8pm. The Aug. 29 and Sept. 5 shows will feature a matinee at 2pm.

Tickets are available in Morgan Hill at the Morgan Hill Community Center, BookSmart, 17415 Monterey Rd., in Gilroy at California Music, 7565 Monterey Rd., and online at www.svct.org. For information on the South Valley Civic Theatre, call 842-7469 or visit www.svct.org.