

## Limelight Theater's "The Country House" is a fascinating journey

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*By Camille Bounds*



Photo by Marty Cheek

Bruce Pember and Rosalind Farotte rehearse for Limelight Actors Theater's upcoming show 'The Country House.'

Director Kevin Heath delivers Limelight Actors Theater's latest show "The Country House" with performances full of love and tenderness given by his talented cast. The story delves into each character and creates in the audience an understanding that makes for an evening of exceptionally fine drama that sets the bar to a high level for South Valley community theater.

Anyone familiar with Russian playwright Anton Checkhov's work will become fascinated with the parallels of the characters in Pulitzer Prize winner Donald Margulies' homage to the writer with his play "The Country House.." The cast are all past Limelight actors and all deliver solid performances.

The plot revolves around impressive and formerly successful stage diva Anna Patterson, (Rosalind Farotte) who summons her family, all obsessed actors, to her country house while she is appearing in her annual foray in summer stock in the Berkshires. They've also come to mourn the first anniversary death at 41 from cancer of her daughter Kathy, also a successful actress. She has also invited Michael Aster (Bruce Pember), a friend and former stage actor who has everyone impressed because he has made it big-time as a doctor on TV series.

It gets more Checkovian when Anna's son, frustrated actor Elliot (Lance LaShelle), who seems to be fumbling through life and announces he has written a dramatic play about a man who kills his mother, burns down the family house and takes his own life. Then there is Anna's son-in-law Walter (John Varela), Kathy's widowed husband, who shows up with a Porsche and a new "hot" girlfriend Nell, (Roberta Vinkhuyzen). Add Suzie, (Dana Morgan) Kathy's and Walter's daughter the only one into the family not into the family acting frenzy.

The first act lets everyone fall into place – and it's a free for all that follows. The second act melds together with colorful comedy and fun. The third act gets down to the business of each characters feelings, especially Elliot who reveals his deepest frustrations to Anna.

Bringing Margulies's characters together with humor and, at times, pathos makes for a well done, well directed enjoyable production. An attractive set designed by Kevin Heath puts everyone in the right place at the right time.

"The Country House" offers an evening in fine theatre.

Don't forget to come early bring or order dinner and enjoy.

Camille Bounds is the theatre, arts and travel columnist for Morgan Hill Life and Gilroy Life/ She can be reached at [bounds17@concentric.net](mailto:bounds17@concentric.net)

### **"The Country House"**

**Where: The Gilroy Center For The Arts, 7341 Monterey Street – Gilroy**

**Through: Feb. 12**

**Running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes with one intermission**

**Tickets: \$20**

**Tickets and Information: (408) 472-3292 or visit: [www.LimelightActorsTheater.com](http://www.LimelightActorsTheater.com)**

# South Valley

## Longing for stardom

### Limelight Actors Theater presents 'The Country House'



**BROADWAY WISHES** Small town actors have their sights on the stars in Limelight Actors Theater's production of 'The Country House.'

A theatrical family plus some wish-they-were-famous folks get together for a summer theater festival in Massachusetts a year after a key family member's death with the expected range of emotional responses in Donald Margulies' comic drama *The Country House*.

The production, directed by Kevin Heath and now on stage at Limelight Actors Theater in Gilroy, references Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* but on a frothier level, with Rosalind Farotte starring as Anna, a former Broadway star bemoaning the state of the theater today—"There are no Broadway stars, dear. Not anymore. Oh, there are stars on Broadway, but they're not Broadway stars."

The summer gathering also includes Anna's granddaughter Susie (Dana Morgan); her son Elliott (Lance LaShelle), a would-be playwright; and her former son-in-law, famous Hollywood director Walter (John Varela), who arrives with his beautiful new girlfriend Nell (Roberta Vinkhuyzen). And if the dynamic weren't interesting enough, Anna also has invited movie star Michael (Bruce Pember) to crash there for a couple of nights as well.

Michael might well be the most interesting character there. He's starred in a hugely popular action series, but longs for the more serious side of theater. As someone comments snidely, he used to be an actor, now he's a celebrity. And was there something going on between him and Susie's late mother in an earlier life? He's a magnet for all the women in the house as well.

In addition to history between Michael and the late Kathy, there's a past relationship between Nell and Elliott, adding more layers to the tale.

Director Heath gets solid, believable performances out of his cast, with notable subtlety and credibility from Vinkhuyzen and Pember in particular. LaShelle brings some nice notes of frustration to his sputtering efforts as a playwright, and Morgan demonstrates both love for her grandmother and grief over her mother's death. Farotte plays Anna as a supercilious, high-maintenance diva.

The action, which never lags, plays out against a set cluttered with artwork and furniture, designed by Heath and created by Glynis Crabb.

*Limelight Actors Theater presents 'The Country House' by Donald Margulies. Performances run through Feb. 18, 2017 at Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey Road, Gilroy. For more information, call (408) 472-3292 or visit [LimelightActorsTheater.com](http://LimelightActorsTheater.com)*



# Camille Bounds Theater Life: Limelight Theater's "The Country House" is a fascinating journey

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