

THEATER scene



Scott Lynch

Scott Lynch has been involved in local community theater for over 10 years and has performed with SVCT & Limelight. He lives in Gilroy, attended Gilroy schools, and graduated from Stanford University with BS and MS degrees in Industrial Engineering. He is currently the president of South Valley Civic Theatre.



South Valley Civic Theater (SVCT) was on a roll in 2020. This amazing year packed in new productions, new producers from diverse backgrounds, and the expansion of performances at Gilroy's Limelight Theater—the space they acquired in January and began renovating soon after. The future looked promising and the group was ready and able to take the reigns as South County's premier theater company.

March Madness; Shelter in Place

Like all small non-profit organizations SVCT's roll came to a hard pause when news of shelter in place broke. They realized quickly that best laid plans can fail due to forces beyond one's control. As our communities recoiled into their respective safe spaces and small businesses, organizations, and agencies found themselves flat-footed, SVCT was no exception. The all-volunteer group had one week left of their successful, sold-out, teen show "Rock of Ages" run. Their next shows, "Cabaret" (at the Morgan Hill Playhouse) and "Tigers Be Still" (at Limelight in Gilroy) were in rehearsal. Hard conversations and hard decisions had to be made.

"We could have probably done the last show but decided to cancel," Elizabeth Mandel, SVCT VP of Publicity recalled, citing the uncertainty of public safety and the host of unknowns

that all gathering places had to grapple with. "We shut it down," Mandel said, confident the organization made the best decision given the information available—or not available, at the time. "We refunded everyone."

With that decision, South Valley Civic Theater came to a screeching halt. All shows were cancelled. All rehearsals stopped. The hammers and drills, saws and paint brushes—to that point actively building stages and props for upcoming shows—were all put down. There was an eerie silence. We all felt it.

With no playbook and little clarity regarding the implications of COVID-19 and related mandates, SVCT—like most small businesses and organizations, sustained a crushing blow. Then, as all successful small businesses and organizations do, SVCT took the hit like a seasoned prizefighter and quickly found their feet again.

"We have a small, nimble group of creative people. A few of us are drivers, others are doers, and we all did the best we could," Mandel said. "I am proud of our tenacity and vision."

Rising from the canvas, SVCT picked up their hammers and used the opportunity to make lighting and design updates at Limelight Theater in Gilroy. They purchased a green screen, new cameras and lighting—everything needed to build a new sound stage in their Morgan Hill warehouse. There, they had ample room to begin production on a series of one-person readings and two-person plays, while ensuring safe distancing protocols. They began streaming their newly produced readings and plays online at no cost to the public. For other online plays, they began filming from the now completely renovated stage at Limelight, creating simple sets as an alternative to using the green screen. For still other productions



The Show Must Go On ... Acting Out During SIP

they utilized Zoom and Facebook Live. Everyone involved had to adjust, learn new techniques, and adapt to the new reality of theater in the time of COVID. Adapt they did.

Their first production, “Kalamazoo” was available for online viewing on July 10 and ran through July 12. The two-person, one act comedy featured Roz Farotte as “Peg” and Peter Mandel as “Irv” and told the story of two baby-boomers looking for love a second time around. Next came “Bad Auditions... On Camera” a one-night only live performance featuring 19 SVCT actors—streamed via Facebook Live on July 26. Produced by Adrienne Wilkinson, Tiffany Goller and Mary Beth Anderson, this interactive ensemble comedy about a casting director with one day to find an actor to fill a role—a seemingly simple task—invited viewers to vote for the actor most worthy of the role.

“Tru” a one-person show adapted from the works of Truman Capote, and reprising Bill Tindall in his acclaimed 2016 representation of Capote, streamed online August 28-30. “2 Across” a green screen production featuring Whitney Pintello and Charlie Gilmore, followed the 80-minute BART train ride where two opposites collide, engage, and are changed for the better—ran October 9 through 11. On October 24, SVCT streamed a teen dance class online where participants learned a song from the Disney hit musical “Newsies” under the direction of Instructor / Choreographer Christine Carrillo and Producer Trish King. Staying in stride, the group produced a youth dance class to the tune of “I Just Can’t Wait to Be King” from the “Lion King” on December 5. The class was held outdoors at the SVCT warehouse with all social distancing and protocols in place.

SVCT finished the year strong with

the Mary Beth Anderson production of “The Night Before Christmas” featuring Rob Christopher as Santa Claus and Avery Mace as Santa’s helper, available online December 11-25. They left no doubt that a small group of tenacious and creative people with vision and courage, can succeed even under the worst circumstances.

SVCT relies almost exclusively on ticket sales and sponsorships. With three-fourths of ticket sales lost in 2020, the group found some reprieve through the Gilroy Foundation—receiving a grant sufficient to provide for the lighting upgrades to the Limelight Theater. Like most small non-profit organizations, what SVCT needs most is a public with the vision for their cause—enhanced and expanded arts in South County, and the tenacity to help make it happen.

“We went from a devastating place of recoiling and reassessing to a place where we started creating and connecting to audiences by learning new skills and using the technologies available,” Mandel observed. For SVCT, the future, with all its uncertainties, still looks bright. “Once we come out of this, we will be a theater company serving all of South County.”

That future includes live performances at the Limelight Theater—an intimate setting redesigned for maximum audience experience, including a full offering of libations and bigger productions and musicals at the Morgan Hill Playhouse.

Visit South Valley Civic Theater online at: svct.org to find information about upcoming shows. Support this local gem of an organization by catching their upcoming online productions. If able, support their efforts to keep the arts alive in South County. Sign up for their newsletter



and follow them on social media... and stay tuned. Soon, we will all be enjoying live performances again. Until then, SVCT will continue to do what they do best—adapt, create, and thrive.

Written By **ELIZABETH MANDEL**