

## Limelight theater returns to action with ‘Ripcord’

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#)

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When the actors of Limelight last stepped on the downtown Gilroy stage, it was for one of the final rehearsals for “Tigers Be Still,” which was set to be the theater company’s first show under the direction of South Valley Civic Theatre.



Limelight’s new “thrust” stage allows audiences to sit around the action. Photo: Erik Chalhoub

But just days before the opening night on March 20, 2020, a performance that would have marked the highly anticipated debut of the stage’s new layout inside the Gilroy Center for the Arts, Santa Clara County announced its first shelter-in-place order in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, effectively ending theater productions and other large gatherings.

Now, nearly two years after [SVCT assumed management of the theater company](#) following the [retirement of longtime Limelight leader Kevin Heath](#), the stage is back to life.

“Ripcord” opens Sept. 10, with shows through Oct. 2 at the center, located at 7341 Monterey St. in Gilroy.

Limelight by SVCT Managing Director Robin Bezanson said some of the performances have already sold out, with each show having a 50-person capacity, pointing to the enthusiastic response the theater company is receiving from audiences craving a return to in-person performances.

Attendees are invited to bring their own dinner to the show, which is a staple of Limelight performances. Under the new guidelines, all audience members, as well as cast and staff, must be fully vaccinated against Covid-19.



Andre Leben (from left), Bruce Pember, Rosalind Farotte and Christy Wait perform a scene at a haunted house. Photo: Erik Chalhoub



Rosalind Wiseman (left) as Abby Binder and Christy Wait as Marilyn Dunne interact during a rehearsal for "Ripcord."  
Photo: Erik Chalhoub

In its new iteration, Limelight has extended the stage area out into a thrust formation, with the audience seated cabaret-style at small tables on three sides of the action. The stage also features new lighting thanks to a grant from the Gilroy Foundation, and expanded bar service.

Bezanson said the layout allows audience members to feel like they are part of the action.

"We're really excited about this," she said.

"Ripcord" Director Angie Higgins agreed.

"There's something very personal and intimate about it," she said. "You do feel like you're in the room. You get to see these micro-expressions almost like you would see in a film."

"Ripcord" follows Abby Binder (played by longtime Limelight actor Rosalind Wiseman), an irritable woman who has long been kept in a room to herself at the Bristol Place Senior Living Facility. But when the always-cheerful Marilyn Dunne (Christy Wait) is placed in her room, Abby tries her best to force her new roommate out. The two women make a bet: if Abby can make Marilyn angry, Marilyn will move out. But if Marilyn can frighten Abby, who claims to be fearless, she will get the bed by the window.



The cast also includes Limelight favorites Roberta Vinkhuyzen and Bruce Pember, along with newcomers Andre Leben and Erik Browne.

Bezanson said the reopening of Limelight with a comedy was deliberate, giving audiences some much-needed laughter after a difficult year-and-a-half.

“It’s nice to open with a funny show,” she said. “We need some laughter after this horrible hiatus.”

Higgins said the show is a comedy with heart and depth, making the characters more relatable and giving audiences a human connection that had been lost in the recent era of social distancing and virtual performances.

“The best comedies are the ones that have a little bit of drama mixed in,” she said. “It has that. The writing is very sharp and witty.”

Higgins, who is directing her first show with Limelight, has been at the helm of shows with other companies in the past, including recent virtual productions.

“The virtual shows are definitely making the best of difficult circumstances,” she said. “But no matter how much you put into it, nothing replaces in-person. The energy you get from a live audience, there’s just nothing like that. It’s been a breath of fresh air.”

She praised the cast and crew, who after a long hiatus from the physical stage, quickly got back into the groove during rehearsals.

“It’s almost like riding a bike,” she said. “That’s probably because everyone involved is just so happy to be doing something they love. They love that sense of camaraderie, they love creating art, they love sharing it with an audience.”

“Ripcord” runs select days from Sept. 10-Oct. 2. Admission is \$25. To purchase tickets, visit [svct.org/2021\\_ripcord](https://svct.org/2021_ripcord).

## Nonprofit profile: SVCT's Limelight Theater's 'Ripcord' bringing comedy-drama to downtown Gilroy stage

<https://morganhilllife.com/2021/09/04/nonprofit-profile-svcts-limelight-theaters-ripcord-bringing-comedy-drama-to-downtown-gilroy-stage/>

Play is full of surprises as two mature women manipulate each other in a seemingly harmless bet

By Marty Cheek



Back row, from left: Roberta Vinkhuyzen and Erik Browne; and front row, from left: Christy Wait and Rosalind Farotte, rehearse. Photo courtesy Limelight

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Live theater is making a comeback in South Valley. Local audiences will enjoy lots of laughs with the comedy show "Ripcord," which opens Friday, Sept. 10, at the Limelight Theater in downtown Gilroy.

David Lindsay-Abaire's 2015 off-Broadway play is a slapstick comedy full of surprising twists in which two mature women in a senior living facility manipulate each other in a seemingly harmless bet that quickly escalates into a dangerous game of one-upmanship.

The South Valley Civic Theater producers wanted to open *Limelight*'s season with a "feel good" show because of the stress on local residents from the COVID-19 pandemic, said director Angie Higgins.

"We've all been beaten down by the last year and a half, and we need an escape," she said. "We need to join together as a community to have some laughs with a story with heart — and that's why the producers decided to open the season with 'Ripcord' instead of doing it later in the season."

The plot brings together "Abby Binder" (played by Rosalind Farotte) and "Marilyn Dunne" (played by Christy Wait) as roommates at the Bristol Place Senior Living Facility. For four years Abby Binder has kept a room to herself through the sheer force of her rude personality. When "bubbly, bright, and unbearably cheerful" Marilyn is placed in her room, Abby tries her usual tricks but fails to scare her annoying new roommate away. As the odd couple play emotionally and physically dangerous tricks on each other their secrets are revealed.

Other performers in the show are Andre Leben (playing the resident aide "Scotty") and Roberta Vinkhuyzen, Erik Browne and Bruce Pember playing various supporting roles. Robin Bezanson serves as the managing director and Denee Lewis is the assistant director for the show.

Farotte knew she wanted to play the irascible Abby the minute she read the script. The role combines hilarious comedy with emotional drama, which challenges the actress to play a fascinating character.

"I love Abby," she said. "She's very snarky and has just biting words. She's really not the nicest person in the world. There are things that have happened to her that make her like that. She has some really great one-liners and I just read the script and said, 'Yep, that's what I want to be.'"

As the play progresses, Abby's personality changes as she grows aware of where she is in life and what she's lost in life, Farotte said.

Wait describes the always cheerful Marilyn as a character who sees Abby as a challenge and so decides to prove to her there's a more optimistic view of life. No matter what happens, she sees the sunny side, she said of her character.

"Marilyn is a glass mostly full type gal," she said about her role. "She's been thrown some rotten eggs in her life, but she has persevered and has not given up on the people in her life. . . She's a survivor. She lived through kind of a difficult marriage. She just saw it through, she didn't give up on it. And it's just paid off. So she's not giving up on Abby either."





Wait is having fun in the show because the cast and crew have been a delight to work with, she said.

“I love being with theater people. ‘There’s no people like show people,’” she said. “To just show up every night with people you love to create art with, to just delve into a character and try to be real with it, to try to be in the moment and authentic, there’s a real joy to that. I can be really tired and show up at that rehearsal and I’m energized.”

Audiences familiar with Limelight’s proscenium stage will be delighted to see it has been reconfigured to be a three-quarters in the round stage, enabling people to sit around the set and feel as if they are part of the show, Higgins said. Public health considerations for COVID-19 will be in place during the performances. About 50 seats will be available.

“The audience will get a really intimate experience,” she said. “They’ll be up-close and personal with, of course, safe distancing. They’ll be able to see the actors’ expressions really well. They’ll feel like they’re actually in the room.”

## **Around Town ... with Robert Airoidi: Live theater is back with Limelight's funny, entertaining 'Ripcord'**

Farotte and Dunne's fine performances in a complicated plot will make audiences appreciate their delivery.

<https://morganhilllife.com/2021/09/17/around-town-with-robert-airoidi-live-theater-is-back-with-limelights-funny-entertaining-ripcord/>



Roberta Vinkhuyzen (dark hair) and Christy Wait (blonde), in Limelight's Ripcord.  
Photo courtesy Limelight Theater



Morgan Hill Life's theater review goddess Camille Bounds recently saw "Ripcord," the latest production by the Limelight Theater, a small venue group managed by the South Valley Civic Theatre.

She told us she immensely enjoyed the comedy-drama, calling it "bright, and entertaining" and saying the cast carries the show with a strong sense of believability with a plot that zigs and zags with humor and heartbreak.

Rosalind Farotte plays Abby Binder with the force of a Sherman tank demanding her need to keep her room to herself at her assisted living facility. Marilyn Dunne is the new roommate Christy Wait who has the ability and charm that equals Abby's force and mental ability. Their fine performances in a complicated plot will make audiences appreciate their delivery.

Andre Leben, Roberta Vinkbuyzen, Bruce Pember and Eric Browne add to this super cast. Director Angi Higgins moves the actors on a set that brings the stage out to the audience practically involving them in scenery changes.

"Between the viruses and politics this well done production is timed perfectly," Bound said. "Humor and fun is the order of the day — and we sure need it."

Catch the show "Ripcord" at the Limelight Theater at 7341 Monterey St., in downtown Gilroy. Remaining shows are 8 p.m. Sept. 24 and 25 and 2 p.m. Sept. 26 and 8 p.m. Oct. 1 and 2.

For information: [www.svct.org/2021.ripcord](http://www.svct.org/2021.ripcord).