

## South Valley Civic Theatre's 'Beauty and the Beast' is a hit

Fast-moving story keeps adults and kids entertained with exciting dances, fun songs, and lots of humor

By Camille Bounds

Published in the July 6-19, 2022 issue of Gilroy Life

<https://gilroylife.com/2022/07/01/theater-review-by-camille-bounds-south-valley-civic-theatres-beauty-and-the-beast-is-a-hit/>



Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel of SVCT

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Walt Disney Pictures took the delightful fairytale of "Beauty and the Beast" and created a beautifully animated movie in 1991 that transported children and adults to another time and place.

South Valley Civic Theatre took the Broadway show version and brings a delightful presentation to the stage of the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

This family show reveals the romantic adventures of “Belle” (played by Nicole King-Yarbrough), a bibliophilic young woman in a provincial French town, and “the Beast” (played by Ken Christopher), a young prince trapped under an enchantress’s spell as punishment for his arrogance.

If “the Beast” can learn to love and be loved, the curse will end and he will be transformed from a monstrous figure into his former self.



Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel of SVCT

The show recreates all the animated characters from the movie including a candlestick (“Luminere,” played with charming verve by Gannon Janisch), a clock (“Cogsworth,” a cautious and nervous Rob Christopher), a feather duster (“Babette,” a sassy Lauren Berling), a motherly teapot and a teacup (“Mrs Potts” and her son “Chip,” played sweetly by Jen Puente and Matthew Horta) and an opera singer transformed into “Wardrobe,” played by Terra Cloutier.

This is the first show King-Yarbrough has performed with SVCT. She performed as “Belle” for another theater company so knew the lines and songs coming to rehearsals. Her remarkable talent for singing and acting makes her sparkle as the story’s heroine.

As “the Beast,” Christopher impressed with a tender evolution of his cursed character wallowing in self-pity until he realizes he has a heart.

His well-known Gilroy garlic-growing family’s Christopher Foundation underwrote “Beauty and the Beast,” enabling SVCT to provide the high-quality sets and costumes that they envisioned for this production.



Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel of SVCT



“As the villain “Gaston,” Zack Goller provides both menace and comic relief. Zack and his sidekick Michael Horta (LeFou) deliver laugh-out-loud performances with precise comedic timing.” The “Silly Girls” ( Lindsay Petroff, Paige DeRosa, and Angelina Villafranca) perfectly complete the Gaston fan club with their besotted expressions and behavior.

The ensemble cast also includes Michael Grimm (Maurice), John Brewer (Monsieur D’Arque), and Jillian Puente (Enchantress). The townspeople and enchanted objects are Brielle Johnson, Lila Vickerman, Chloe Grotz, Eli Barnson, Gabriella Estrada, Joyce Bedard, Gabriella Horta, Grace Butler,, Gianna Garcia, Robin Harris, Jase Puente, Ruby Salvatti, Jillian Grotz, Miriam Shem-Tov, Kaitlyn Gomez, Stacia Stewart and London McWilliams.

Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel of SVCT

The orchestra, under the baton of Roberta Howe, brings in a tight musical version of this beloved story. Alan Menken’s music and Howard Ashman and Tim Rice’s lyrics ran away with Academy Awards for the movie and Tony’s for the Broadway version with popular songs “Be Our Guest,” “Beauty and The Beast,” and “Something There.” SVCT’s musicians bring the catchy show tunes to lovely life.

The “Beauty and the Beast” producers are Ingrid Rottman, Michael Horta, Marianne Snook.

The director is Alan Chipman. The vocal director is Lynette Oliphant. The choreographer is Jyovonne Tirodkar. The costume designers — who are Broadway caliber — are Kimberly Lynch, Veronica Salvatti and Mary Beth Anderson. The stage manager is Joseph Ramirez.

The real heroes of this production are the technical people backstage led by Kelley Barnes who move the elaborate sets with fluid swiftness. Technical sound designers Brian Bourke and Coco Crowley and lighting designer Colleen Blanchard and technician Clara Shem-Tov are always on cue.

The musical show opened June 24 and runs until July 16.

SVCT’s production of “Beauty and the Beast” is the best theater experience you will now find anywhere in the South Valley. It’s right here (hardly any gasoline to use) and no traffic and parking hassles.

This fast-moving story will keep adults and kids highly entertained with exciting dance sequences, fun songs and plenty of humor. For a charming afternoon or evening show, go and let yourself be enchanted.

## **‘Beauty and the Beast’ hits the South Valley Civic Theatre stage**

Classic Disney story features high-quality sets and elaborate costumes

<https://morganhilllife.com/2022/06/11/entertainment-beauty-and-the-beast-hits-the-south-valley-civic-theatre-stage/>

Published in the June 15-28, 2022 issue of Morgan Hill Life

By Marty Cheek



Telling a tale of inner and outer transformation, South Valley Civic Theatre brings to the stage the classic story "Beauty and the Beast."

The musical show opens June 17 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse and runs for 13 shows until July 16.



Based on the Academy Award-winning animated feature produced by Walt Disney Pictures in 1991, this family show reveals the romantic adventures of "Belle" (played by Nicole King-Yarbrough), a bibliophilic young woman in a provincial French town, and "the Beast" (played by Ken Christopher), a young prince trapped under an enchantress's spell as punishment for his arrogance. If the Beast can learn to love and be loved, the curse will end and he will be transformed from a monstrous figure into his

1 Photo by Chris Foster Zack Goller as "Gaston"

This is the first show King-Yarbrough has performed with SVCT. The Livermore resident performed as "Belle" previously for another theater company, so she knew the lines and songs coming to rehearsals. She is impressed by the quality of her fellow SVCT performers.

"The cast is incredible. There's so much talent in telling this beautiful story," she said. "It's so fun and welcoming. Everyone has been so nice and we all have a lot of fun. Everyone is joking and at the same time we work hard."



As "the Beast," Ken Christopher is impressed by the high quality of this production. His uncle, Rob Christopher, has performed in many SVCT shows, but this is the first time Ken has acted in a local show.

"There's an evolution that happens to 'the Beast' throughout the show," he said. "My first song is all about self-pity. 'Why are all these things happening to me? I did nothing wrong. I am not to blame.' And then before intermission, it begins to dawn on him that he has a heart."

Photo by Chris Foster. Gannon Janisch as "Lumiere the Candle."

The Christopher Foundation underwrote “Beauty and the Beast” to make sure the show has high-quality sets and costumes. “We want to give something special and spectacular to the community, something that people haven’t seen for years — and after two years of COVID the community deserves it,” Christopher said.

As the villain “Gaston,” Zack Goller provides comic relief as well as menace to the story’s plot. It is a “bucket list” role for him. After waiting for stage performances to return following the pandemic, he is eager to entertain audiences again.



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“There’s nothing like the spectacle of live theater,” he said. “That’s what people have been missing for the past two years. I certainly missed it.”

The added expense in building an elaborate set and suiting the performers in colorful costumes will add to the audience’s experience, said director Alan Chipman.

“This is going to be one of our better shows, that’s for sure,” he said. “Between the time put into it, the talent that we’ve got, the investment that’s been put into it, it will be a sensational experience.”

# MORGAN HILL THE TIMES

## ‘Beauty’ shines through in latest SVCT show

Director: Production is a ‘step beyond’ previous performances

<https://morganhilltimes.com/beauty-shines-through-latest-svct-show/>

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#)

June 10, 2022



Ken Christopher (Beast) and Nicole Yarbrough (Belle) star in South Valley Civic Theatre’s “Beauty and the Beast,” opening June 17. Photo: Chris Foster

It’s safe to say that Nicole Yarbrough knows more about “Beauty and the Beast” than the average person.

The Livermore resident will star as Belle, one of the leads in South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming performance of the classic Disney tale. Turns out, this will be the third time she's been in a "Beauty and the Beast" production, and has played Belle before.

Her mother "very much loves" the show, Yarbrough noted, and even notified her of SVCT's auditions for the production.

Yarbrough, who recently had a son and had already spent some time away from the theater world due to the Covid-19 pandemic, decided to take a shot at the audition.

"I thought it would be a good way to get myself back out there," she said. "It all kind of clicked."

This time around, Yarbrough said she's taking a deep dive into the character of Belle, researching the character's origins and how she has been portrayed over the years.

"Out of all the Disney princesses, she's the brains, the bravest," Yarbrough said. "I want to show her adventurous side and play her more fun and upbeat, while also being sincere and true to herself."

"Beauty and the Beast," which made its Broadway debut in 1994 based off of the Disney animated feature, follows Belle, who falls in love with the Beast, a prince who is transformed by a curse. The Beast, a brash, self-absorbed character, must learn to love in order for the spell to be lifted.

The Beast in SVCT's production will be played by Ken Christopher. Christopher is perhaps best known for his role as executive vice president of Gilroy-based Christopher Ranch, promoting the benefits of California-grown garlic to the nation, but the staunch advocate of the bulb also has an acting repertoire that he is beginning to revive.

Christopher, who in recent years has [starred in various social media clips](#), from the serious to the goofy, said he last performed in the theater 15 years ago, when he played Tony in "West Side Story."

"It's a dream role," Christopher said of playing Beast. "The music is so extraordinarily beautiful. To have the opportunity to even attempt it is really exciting and a privilege."

Christopher will perform in a getup he affectionately refers to as "the buffalo," complete with face prosthetics, a full chestpiece and more.

"We're going all out to deliver the fantasy," he said.

Director Alan Chipman said "Beauty and the Beast" is going to be a "special show," praising the support of the Christopher Ranch Foundation.

"We've always done fantastic stuff, but this is a step beyond," said Chipman, who has been involved with more than two dozen SVCT productions. "Our costumes are fantastic. Our set is quite elaborate. It is one of the most, if not the most elaborate set we've done here."

During a recent rehearsal, Chipman showed off some of the sets, from a towering castle that looms over the cast to an elaborate town scene with various details.

Chipman said the family show has a positive message for all ages.

“A huge motivation for us to do a fantastic show is the fact that this is the first family show we’ve done in three years,” he said.

Both Yarbrough and Christopher said the performers have developed a strong chemistry since being cast last year, which they say will come through in their performances.

Yarbrough said she also has the added pressure of being a role model for the younger audiences.

“I really want to set that role model for those kids that come here,” she said. “That’s what drives me. We want it to be a magical experience for everybody.”

“Beauty and the Beast” by South Valley Civic Theatre runs select days from June 17 to July 16 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. For information and tickets, visit [svct.org/2022\\_beauty](https://svct.org/2022_beauty).