

## Relationship blooms after 30 years in Limelight's romantic comedy

Tender play runs through Feb. 12

By Camille Bounds

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Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel

From left: Jim McCann as "Austin," Roberta Vinkhuyzen who plays five characters, Bruce Pember who plays five characters, and Sandi Lewandowski playing "Ruth."

Limelight Theater's "Later Life" offers audiences a delightful charmer. The romantic comedy brings a couple together after a fling 30 years ago, forcing them to face pain and gentle humor as their newly revived relationship blooms.

In the show that opened Jan. 20 and closes Feb. 12, “Ruth” (played by Sandi Lewandowski) and “Austin” (Jim McCann) fall in love in their 20s on the island of Capri, only to part after one day together. Now in their 50s, they are re-introduced at a Boston cocktail party by the hostess.

“Ruth” remembers the details of their brief romance while “Austin” stretches his mind to recall. When they finally put the time and place together, they start questioning why the romance didn’t go farther. The united lovers spend the rest of the play treading through a minefield of emotions.

Limelight director Bill Tindall has gathered a solid cast. Bruce Pember and Roberta Vinkhuyzen each play five different guests who interrupt “Ruth” and “Austin” in their search. They all give enthusiastic, fine performances that keeps the show moving and holds the audiences’ attention.

I also admired the show’s set design by Andrew Cummings and the elegant costumes designed by Christine McElroy.

With a really well written script by Pulitzer Prize-nominated playwright A.R. Gurney, the story weaves humor and romance together in a show full of subtle dialogue. It creates moments of deep thoughts mixed with touches of tender reflections that will make you ask yourself, “What if?” Don’t miss one of the best productions Limelight has offered to date.

# Limelight explores the ‘what-if’ in latest production

'Later Life' opens Jan. 20 at Gilroy Center for the Arts

<https://gilroydispatch.com/limelight-explores-the-what-if-in-latest-production/>

By [Erik Chalhoub](#) January 18, 2023



The cast of Limelight's "Later Life": Jim McCain (from left), Roberta Vinkhuyzen, Sandi Lewandowski and Bruce Pember. Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

Nearly everyone has asked themselves at one point in their lives, "What if?"

What if you skipped college and instead traveled the world? What if you turned right instead of left? What if you pursued a romantic relationship with this person instead of that person?

Limelight presented by South Valley Civic Theatre will explore that latter question when it brings A.R. Gurney's "Later Life" to the stage, opening Jan. 20 at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St. The production runs Fridays through Sundays through Feb. 12.

"I think we all wonder what might have happened if we had made a different decision early on in our lives," said Jim McCann, who performs as Austin in the production.

"Later Life" follows Austin, who one night at a party rekindles a romance with Ruth almost 30 years later. Mutual friends view Austin as multiple divorcee Ruth's final shot at a normal life, while they also hope Ruth will break Austin from his cycle of depression, according to a description of the production.

Director Bill Tindall said he was drawn to the script due to its character-driven nature. "The two leads play confused and sometimes contradictory people who have learned few lessons from their experiences but rather persist in their failings," he said. "We see plainly that life is not black and white but many shades of grey."

Being a Limelight production, the cast consists of only four: Jim McCain as Austin, Sandi Lewandowski as Ruth, and Roberta Vinkhuyzen and Bruce Pember, who each portray multiple different characters.

We are fortunate to have a great production team—who've creatively put in many dedicated hours to this play. It's an honor and pleasure to be on the stage with such a talented cast, and likewise to work with our wonderful director, Bill Tindall. —*Sandi Lewandowski (Ruth)*

What makes "Later Life" challenging, but fun to explore, Tindall noted, is emotions, not heavy dialogue, move the story forward, making for a great deal of interpretation for both the audience and the cast and crew.



"I started with four very strong actors and in our first conversations about the script we discussed the ambiguity of some of the characters," he said. "We all understood that we would need to explore together the dialogue and the emotions we would get from it to find the soul of those characters."

Lewandowski said to make her character relatable to the audience, she asked herself two questions:

"How would a 50-something-year-old recently single woman feel if she were suddenly given the opportunity to possibly rekindle an old 'near romance' that occurred decades before? How might one behave?"

She added that Gurney's writing has the feel of a modern bittersweet comedy, but takes many elements found in a classical Greek play.

"If audiences pay attention, they will often hear the same phrases being said by the different characters but in different contexts with different meanings," Lewandowski said. "Like Greek theater, we have a hero (Austin) and various players d break his stasis."

Jim McCain and Sandi Lewandowski star in Limelight presented by South Valley Civic Theatre's "Later Life."

Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

The process of getting this together is such a team effort, I've been very impressed. Not just with the other actors, who are all amazing, but the entire production team from the producers to the costuming and set design. I think the audience will be in for a very entertaining, and sometimes surprising, evening. —*Jim McCain (Austin)*

The story of "Later Life" lends itself nicely to a small cast and stage, which is beneficial to both the audience and the cast, McCain said.

"It allows the actors, and I think the audience as well, to experience the energy between the characters in a visceral way, like they are eavesdropping on conversations," he said. "You can really feel it when the audience is engaged, and you can ride that energy and play with it."

"Later Life" opens Jan. 20 at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St. The production runs Fridays and Saturdays at 8pm, and Sundays at 2pm through Feb. 12. For tickets, visit [svct.org/2023\\_laterlife](http://svct.org/2023_laterlife)



## Limelight's warmhearted 'Later Life' shows challenges of romance

Stage set, costumes are designed as if for a black-and-white film

<https://morganhilllife.com/2023/01/04/limelight-later-life/>

By Marty Cheek, Jan 11, 2023



Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel

From left: Jim McCann as "Austin," Roberta Vinkhuyzen who plays four characters, Bruce Pember who plays four characters, and Sandi Lewandowski playing "Ruth."

A couple in their 20s fall in love on the island of Capri but part after only one day together. Nearly 30 years later, they meet at a Boston cocktail party and must face pain and comedy as their newly revived relationship blooms in Limelight Theater's play "Later Life."

The A.R. Gurney play opens Jan. 20. It weaves humor and romance together in a show full of subtle dialogue that reveals, much like a Neil Simon play, the inner lives of the various characters, said director Bill Tindall.

The first time he read the script, he knew Limelight needed to produce it. There was some reluctance, but when he insisted the quality of the writing was exceptional, they agreed to put it on stage with the caveat he must direct it.

"It's a really wonderful look at humanity," the veteran actor said. "The humor says life is not black and white, there's a lot of grey. I think we've done a good job of developing the characters and giving the audience a chance to get interested in them. I think the people are going to like the characters."



Jim McCann plays “Austin,” a man who “is very educated but just kind of misses a lot in life because he’s a little too reserved,” Tindall said. He meets “Ruth,” played by Sandi Lewandowski, and the two rekindle their romance. Roberta Vinkhuyzen and Bruce Pember play five characters each in the various scenes of the show.

Lewandowski felt intrigued by how the play’s writing sympathizes with the characters while portraying them for the fools they are. Participating in more of a “dramatic piece” than Limelight usually does has been enticing as it allowed her to expand her acting skills.

“I find my character ‘Ruth’ to be challenging and complex,” she said. “Her life has been marred by several tragedies and she continues to struggle with just trying to get things right on her journey.”

McCann was initially attracted by the idea of playing a man in his late 50s who is presented with a second chance in life. But as he dug into the role, it revealed much more might going on beneath the surface, and the story takes the audience in a direction they might not expect.

Photo by Elizabeth Mandel for Limelight Theater

“It’s a welcome challenge for me, as I haven’t been on stage in a few years, and I’m enjoying the process of discovery as the characters evolve,” he said. “This cast is amazing and I’m really looking forward to playing in front of a live audience again.”

The fun of playing five “wildly” different characters who interact with “Austin” and “Ruth” and the laughs in the show attracted Vinkhuyzen to perform in “Later Life.” She appreciates the creativity in collaborating with the team of cast and crew.

“The play is hugely entertaining, but the poignant message about living life to its fullest and embracing the highs and lows will stick with you longer after the curtain falls,” she said.

The idea of playing five different characters from very different walks of life was intriguing to Pember. Being able to find comedy in each of their stories while also finding what makes each of them a real human was a challenge that excited him.

“The thematic elements of the show involving aging and life choices, whether you allow them to define you or you allow yourself to make different choices, spoke to me as a man in my ‘later life’ as well,” he said.

Tindell praised the set design by Andrew Cummings, which is an apartment terrace overlooking Boston Harbor.

The costumes were designed by Christine McElroy to reflect a “black and white” movie style, he said.

“I think people are really going to enjoy the story because it has so many twists and turns,” he said.