

Entertainment: Female soccer players face real life issues in Limelight's 'The Wolves'

Teenagers address many challenging topics with wide-ranging relevance

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Photo courtesy Elizabeth Mandel, Limelight Members of "The Wolves" soccer team discuss real life issues on stage at Limelight Theater

An audacious and unapologetic theatrical experience will hustle onto the field at the Limelight Theater in downtown Gilroy. “The Wolves” follows a girls’ indoor soccer team as they prepare to take on their opponents — as well as the many challenges of life.

Set over the course of their five-week soccer season, this realistic drama (a Pulitzer Prize finalist written by Sarah DeLapp) gives the audience only brief glimpses of the players’ lives. During their weekly warmups before each game, the girls discuss every kind of issue imaginable, from deeply personal to globally significant. Meanwhile, the audience is left to read between the lines to piece together what has happened off-stage between the practices.

“It’s very real,” said Emily Shem-Tov, Limelight managing director. “There is adult language and adult situations. It’s a real slice of life, as if you were out at a soccer practice with a gang of people. When we’re listening to these young women rehearse, they talk just like that. I love how they go from the very personal to world-shaking topics all at once, because everything is important and interconnected when you’re that age.”

With an all-female cast featuring one adult soccer mom and nine teenage athletes, “The Wolves” has universal appeal that will be relatable for all ages, said Carol Harris, the director.



“This play will bring back experiences for everybody,” she said. “One of my favorite things about theater is, if a performance brings back to you some experience that you’ve had in your life, it really will touch you. And I can’t think of one person who won’t relate to what these characters experience.”

The players, who are only referred to using their jersey numbers, unapologetically address contemporary and adult topics ranging from global terrorism to menstruation.

“It can be tough at times, because, yes, they talk about some subjects that may be uncomfortable for some,” said Riley Brown, who plays “No. 7,” the archetypal too-cool-for-school “bad girl” of the team. “It is very extreme realism. It is a group of teenage girls talking about real-life subjects and having real drama with each other and cracking jokes and having friendships. Some topics might be uncomfortable but are important to talk about.”

The format of each scene is intended to be as close to an organic experience as possible, Harris said. The players kick the ball around as they run through their warm-up drills, maintaining multiple concurrent conversations.

“The author doesn’t want everybody in the audience to hear every conversation happening onstage,” she said. “There are sometimes three groups talking at once about different topics. That is what she wanted. Try to listen to a group of teenagers — do you really understand everything that they’re talking about?”

The Limelight crew arranged the “stage” in a unique way. The audience sits around three sides of the set, which consists of artificial grass directly on the floor. This lets actresses be on the audience level.

“It is very immersive,” Brown said. “You’re going to say, ‘I am a part of this team now.’ It’s so real and so relatable that I think there is at least one part or another that anyone, no matter their demographic, can relate to.”



Between the up-close-and-personal staging and the organic chaos of the overlapping dialogue, “The Wolves” promises to surprise and delight theater regulars with a completely unique viewing experience, said Allie Purtel, aka “No. 14.”

"I'd never seen anything like this before," she said. "I think people are going to be at first very shocked and surprised, but then they're going to be glad that these topics are being discussed. The word I always use is 'experimental.'"

Ultimately, "The Wolves" is not merely a story about a soccer team, it is an examination of friendship, teamwork and what it is like coming of age as a young woman in America. The challenges they face are as real and layered as what most young people experience every day.

"I don't think everybody is going to come out of the show with one overriding message," Shem-Tov said. "It's something that people will leave talking about and wondering about. It's a discussion-starter show, and I think it's open-ended enough that I expect audiences will be very engaged."

Young cast bonds in Limelight's 'The Wolves'

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#) August 30, 2023

<https://morganhilltimes.com/young-cast-bonds-limelight-wolves/>



Limelight by South Valley Civic Theatre's "The Wolves" opens Sept. 8 for a two-week run at the Gilroy Center for the Arts. Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

Just before rehearsal for "The Wolves" kicked off on the evening of Aug. 24, the Gilroy Center for the Arts was filled with the sounds of excited chatter, outbursts of giggling and the occasional shout.

The cast of nine girls, the majority in their teens, had only begun rehearsing fairly recently, and many didn't know each other before they were cast in the show.

But they quickly formed a close bond, not only on stage but off it, something that proves critical to portraying a girls' soccer team in Limelight by South Valley Civic Theatre's "The Wolves," which opens for a two-week run on Sept. 8.

The play, written by Sarah DeLappe, follows the girls who play for the Wolves team, as they touch on a variety of mature subjects, such as abortion, world politics, cancer and death.

Director Carol Harris said “The Wolves” focuses on many real-life situations that can be uncomfortable, yet the young cast is handling it with poise.

“The girls are marvelous,” she said. “They’ve built a team.”

The focus on the team is prevalent throughout “The Wolves,” where the girls do not have names, only numbers.

Riley Brown, a Christopher High School senior who is portraying “#7,” said the lack of names establishes a blank slate, allowing audiences to gain a sense of who the character is through her actions and words.

Gavilan College student Allie Purtell, whose character “#14” is described as #7’s “insecure sidekick,” agreed, adding that the audience will find many things to relate to from the differing personalities of all the characters.

“These characters are very much based on real things people do,” she said.

Brown described “The Wolves” as “extreme realism,” where difficult topics are discussed but in a comedic sense.

“These are tough subjects that can hit home for a decent amount of people,” she said.

“It’s unlike any other theatrical performance I’ve seen,” Purtell said. “It’s very real and very raw. It’s so different from a typical show with defined characters. This way, people will be able to see themselves in the characters and relate to the issues.”

Emma Beck of Gilroy, who portrays “#46,” said that while she has already known some of the cast, there are others she didn’t, taking it upon herself to get to know her fellow performers.

“It’s really great to come together with all these girls of varying ages,” she said. “I think we’ve all connected with our characters in one way shape or form. I’m really proud of the girls and how the show has turned out.”

One of the challenges of the performance, Beck added, is learning some soccer moves while acting at the same time, as most of the cast has not played the sport before.

To help, Brown’s father Ryan, a soccer coach, has been teaching the girls some moves of the sport. Still, Beck, noting that she has “no foot-eye coordination,” said she is “terrified of kicking the ball into the audience,” who sit close to the action on three sides of the thrust stage.

Beck said she encourages audiences to see the show multiple times, as there will likely be things they missed the first time around, since many scenes have multiple conversations and actions happening at the same time.

“It’s something where everyone can come to the show and say, ‘I relate to someone or some thing,’” she said. “There’s something for everyone, and I think it’s a fantastic thing.”

It was a sentiment echoed by Harris.

“In this show, people can relieve their experiences,” she said. “Some people may be shocked by the language they use, but that’s how kids are these days. I think people will see beyond that to see the value of unity and friendships.”

“The Wolves” opens Sept. 8 and runs through Sept. 17 at the Gilroy Center for the Arts, 7341 Monterey St. Friday and Saturday performances are at 8pm, with Sunday matinees at 2pm.