

Curtain Up Theater Review by Camille Bounds: “On Golden Pond” is heartwarming tale of love and family

The play’s exploration of three different kinds of love is both nuanced and relatable.

Published April 9, 2024 on MorganHillLife.com



By Camille Bounds

The Limelight Actors Theater’s production of the comedic drama “On Golden Pond” is a poignant and beautifully crafted play that explores the complexities of love and family relationships. Director Bryan Freeman’s delicate touch brings out the best in each character, resulting in performances that are deep, satisfying, and complete.

The story follows “Norman” and “Ethel” Thayer, a couple who have been visiting their Maine summer cottage on Golden Pond for nearly five decades. Bill Tindall delivers a fine performance as the elderly Norman, a retired professor who still enjoys reading classified ads and teasing his wife about getting a job. Deep down, however, he grapples with his mortality and the uncertainties of the future. Shelia Ellam, who took over the role of Ethel just three days before the performance, is nothing short of amazing in her portrayal of a loyal

wife content with the simple pleasures of life. She enjoys their leisure by sitting in the sun and talking to the loons on the lake.

Charlie Martin (Kenny Silberberg) the mailman arrives with a letter from the Thayers' only child, "Chelsea" (Kristin Lynn). It notes she is coming to celebrate Norman's 80th birthday and will be bringing her new boyfriend Bill Ray (Doug Brook) and his 13-year-old son Billy Ray (Miriam Shem-Tov). Norman and Ethel agree to keep the boy for a month while Chelsea and her beau go on an European trip.



The arrival of the three brings a new dynamic to the story, adding depth to the relationships explored in the play. As Norman and Billy Jr. bond over fishing and reading during the course of a month, the audience is treated to a heartwarming display of the power of intergenerational connections.

One of the most touching moments of the play comes when Chelsea and Norman finally have a candid conversation, breaking through the emotional barriers that have kept them apart for years. This scene is a testament to the skill of the actors and the director's ability to create a space for genuine emotional connection.

The play's exploration of three different kinds of love – the love Norman has for Ethel, Ethel's love for Norman, and the eventual parental love between Chelsea and Norman – is

both nuanced and relatable. Each relationship is given its moment to shine, and the pacing of the scenes keeps the audience engaged throughout.

The stark and simple set design by Andrew Cummings, paired with the lighting by Clara Shem-Tov, perfectly complements the changing moods of each scene. The minimalist approach allows the actors' performances to take center stage, drawing the audience into the emotional world of the characters.

"On Golden Pond" is a testament to the power of great theater. It is a must-see for anyone who appreciates a well-crafted story, brilliant performances, and the exploration of the universal themes of love and family. This production is a shining example of what community theater can achieve when talent, passion, and dedication come together.

GILROY DISPATCH



ESTABLISHED 1868

A New SV Media publication

Friday, March 22, 2024

gilroydispatch.com • Vol. 157, No. 12 • \$1



Chris Foster

LOCAL PRODUCTION "On Golden Pond" characters Bill Ray (played by Doug Brook), Chelsea (Kristin Lynn) and Norman Thayer, Jr. (Bill Tindall) will take the stage for the play's South County production beginning March 29.

'Golden' team

SVCT TAKES ERNEST THOMPSON CLASSIC TO LOCAL STAGE

MIRIAM SHEM-TOV
Guest contributor

For the past few months, I've been part of the team at South Valley Civic Theatre getting ready to bring the classic play "On Golden Pond" to life on stage in Morgan Hill. The play, written by Ernest Thompson, explores themes of aging, family dynamics and love. When I tell people that I'm in the show, most people mention the famous 1981 film and don't realize that it was first a play.

The plot revolves around an aging couple, Norman (played by Bill Tindall) and Ethel Thayer (played by Ruth E. Stein). They are spending their 48th summer

→ *On Golden Pond*, 3



Chris Foster

TALENTED ACTORS Characters Billy Ray (Miriam Shem-Tov) and Norman Thayer, Jr. (Bill Tindall), are pictured during a recent rehearsal for "On Golden Pond."

Audience may relate to SVCT characters

→ *On Golden Pond*, 3

at their cabin on Golden Pond in Maine leading up to Norman's 80th birthday. They're visited by their daughter Chelsea (played by Kristin Lynn) and her boyfriend Bill Ray (played by Doug Brook), along with Bill's son Billy Ray Jr., who I am playing in the show.

Norman and Chelsea have a complicated, strained relationship, and Chelsea, coming back after living away in California for the past few years, is realizing how much her parents have aged. Rounding out the cast is Kenny Silberberg, playing the family's long-time mailman, Charlie, reminding

them all about previous years on the lake together.

Norman and Ethel agree to care for Billy Jr. while Bill and Chelsea go on a European vacation. Through this unexpected arrangement, a unique and heartwarming relationship blossoms between Norman and Billy.

One of my favorite parts of preparing this show has been getting to work with Bill Tindall to figure out the evolution of our two characters. While it starts off with Billy acting like a typical snarky teenager and Norman coming across as a grumpy old man who has pretty much given up, the two characters grow to like and appreciate each other and turn out to be just what the other needs in their life.

I hope that audiences will come to see themselves and their family relationships in each of the different characters.

This show is directed by Brian Freeman, and his directing style shows through the way the show naturally flows. As we've rehearsed, he has challenged us to consider, "Why would your character say it like that?" and "What is your character thinking at this moment?"

Participating in a theater production is an unparalleled experience. As the auditions, rehearsals and performances unfold, a familial bond forms between the cast members and the backstage crew who bring the show to life.

This particular performance is a must-see as it explores the complexities of aging and the struggles faced by our aging loved ones. It's a thoughtful, moving and humorous portrayal of life's dynamics. We look forward to welcoming you to the show!

Miriam Shem-Tov is a 13-year-old 7th grader at Oakwood School who has acted in 30-plus productions. "On Golden Pond" is her seventh with South Valley Civic Theatre. "On Golden Pond" opens March 29, and runs weekends through April 13 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road in Morgan Hill. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit svct.org.



Photo: Barbara

FUN ON STAGE "On Golden Pond" characters Ethel Thayer (played by Ruth E. Stein) and Charlie Martin (Kenny Silberberg) are pictured during a recent rehearsal of the South Valley Civic Theatre production.

Theater: Limelight's 'On Golden Pond' examines the complexities of family

Comedic drama addresses topics of marital relationships, inter-generational division, and unconditional love

Published in the March 20-April 9, 2024 issue of Morgan Hill Life



From left: Kristin Lynn as Chelsea Thayer Wayne, Miriam Shem-Tov as Billy Ray, Bill Tindall as Norman Thayer Jr., and RuthE. Stein as Ethel Thayer in Limelight Actors Theater's production of "On Golden Pond."

By Calvin Nuttall

A heartwarming tale of family dynamics and reconciliation, "On Golden Pond" opens at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse March 29. Limelight Actors Theater's production of the classic comedic drama explores themes of aging, regret and the complexities of intergenerational bonds.

When elderly "Norman Thayer's" estranged daughter suddenly returns to his life, he is initially resistant. However, as he gradually becomes aware of his own mental decline, he is forced to grapple with the reality he may be running out of time to repair his relationships with the people who matter the most to him.

"It's a play about family and honesty, which includes all of the dysfunction that comes with it," said director Bryan Freeman. "One of the things that I enjoy about it is that it doesn't hide the sometimes brutally honest nature of family."

Bill Tindall stars as "Norman Thayer," a curmudgeon in the golden years of his life. RuthE Stein plays his wife "Ethel," the emotional anchor of the family. And Kristin Lynn is "Chelsea," the couple's daughter who, like her dad, is strongly independent.

The show takes place during the senior couple's visit to their summer home on Golden Pond for the 48th year in a row. There they are joined by Chelsea, her boyfriend, "Bill Ray," played by Doug Brook, and his son, "Billy Ray Jr.," played by Miriam Shem-Tov.

"Chelsea has been away for eight years, and doesn't realize how old they have gotten until she comes back and sees them again," Lynn said. "While she doesn't plan to keep up the grudge for the duration of their lives, I think she hasn't quite come to terms with the fact she has limited amount of time to make up with them."

Chelsea is a "feisty, down-to-earth" woman with a morbid streak that takes after her father, Lynn said. Her similarities to her dad are one source of the friction in their relationship, as both individuals are strongly independent, causing them to clash.

"He is used to being in control of everything," Tindall said. "He is pretty harsh with his words. He certainly has a soft spot for his wife, he is very much in love with her. His daughter, I think they just never clicked. She tried and tried and tried, and just was never quite enough. I'm not sure he even knows why himself."

Made famous by actors Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda and Jane Fonda in the 1981 film, *Limelight* actors bring this inter-generational rivalry to life onstage. Originally based in Gilroy as a presentation of South Valley Civic Theater, the theater company recently lost its home at the Gilroy Center for the Arts and is now performing at the Playhouse as it finds a new venue.

While the story remains fundamentally the same as the movie, this group of performers has brought their unique voice to the classic roles, Freeman said.

"It's fun watching these two play-off of each other," he said. "It is very much the idea of becoming the parent you may not necessarily get along with the best. There are strongly similar personality traits between the two characters, even through their disagreements."

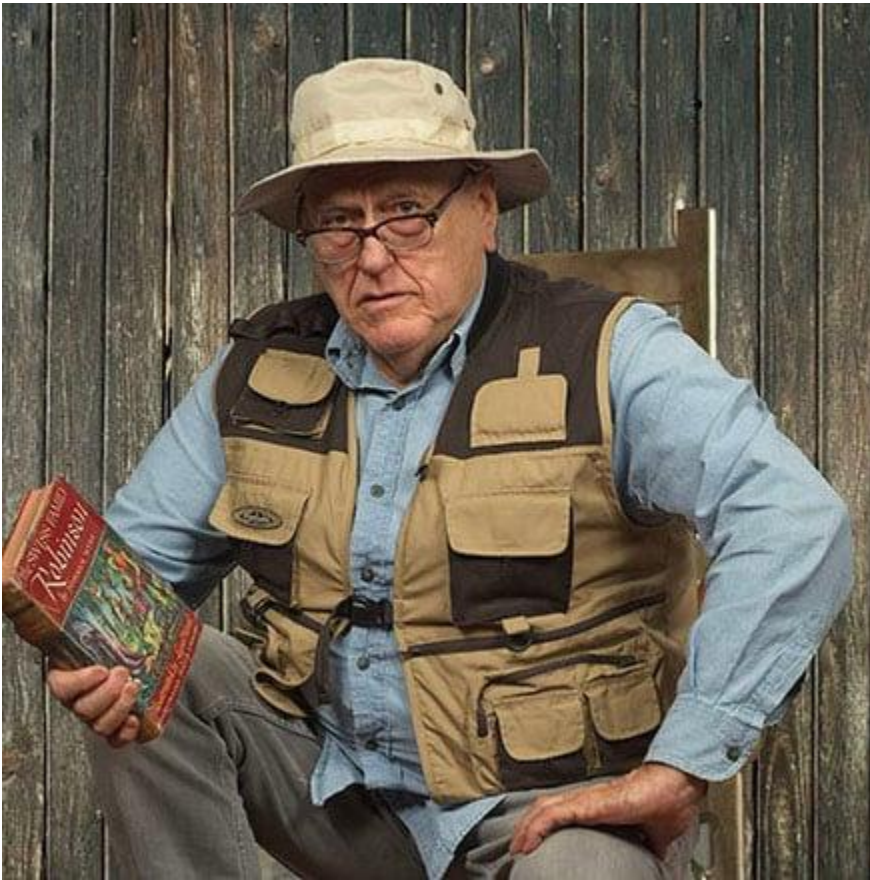
As her lifelong partner's cognitive ability gradually declines, Ethel quickly catches notice, and takes on the burden of his care.

"She understands him better than anybody else in the world," Stein said. "He can be a handful, but I know him well enough, because I have seen him and how wonderful he is. He doesn't show that to very many people. She is slowly discovering these changes he is going through, and thinking, 'What the heck is going on with you this summer?' And all of these little pieces start coming together."

The younger couple ask Norman and Ethel to look after Billy Jr. while they go on vacation. Ethel agrees, much to Norman's chagrin, and the two temporarily take in the young man. Despite his initial hesitation, Billy's youthful exuberance quickly wins over the grouchy Norman.

"It certainly changes him," Tindall said. "He is the boy he has always wanted, which is really sad for Chelsea. Billy is just as feisty, just as independent as Norman. He never quite admits it, but I think he is a bit excited to have this kid around. Through the process, they become great friends."

The addition of the young man brightens the elderly couple's lives and revitalizes Norman. The two begin to spend much of their time fishing. Their relationship creates an avenue for the father to find common ground with which to reconcile with his daughter.



“I like the way Bryan has directed us,” Stein said. “In some versions of the story, it is just too saccharine-sweet. That is not his intent, his intent is to turn it over and look at its underbelly and see what is really going on. He doesn’t let us shy away from that. This is the hardest I’ve ever worked, because he is so good at pulling more out of actors than they ever thought they could do.”

Between the small cast size and the dramatic format, the actors agreed rehearsing has been unlike most shows they have been involved with.

“It’s been more like a workshop than a rehearsal, which I love,” Tindall said. “It’s a completely different process for me than a lot of shows. We have had a lot of time to really look at the dialogue, which I love dissecting, and really trying to find something new and different. We’ve

been able to try different things and different emotions and I’ve been very appreciative of the process.”

Freeman refers to himself as merely an “elevated audience member” in his directing style, preferring to allow the actors to find the characters themselves through the rehearsal process. Doing so lends a more natural feel to the performance, which the audience will find more relatable.

“Bryan really helped us find these characters with the clues in the script,” Lynn said. “Once you are ‘off-book,’ (off the script) it gives you the chance to interpret what is behind the particular lines, the difference between what she is saying and what she means. Now you can bring that meaning into your voice, into your physicality.”

In theater, as in movies and television, much work happens behind the scenes to bring the story to life. “On Golden Pond” is no exception.

“Art at its best is collaborative,” Freeman said. “It’s a collaboration between the director, the actors, the crew who lights them and gives them sound, the people who built the sets, and most importantly, the audience. That is the beauty of theater compared to film — it’s immediate, it’s happening right before you.”

Calvin Nuttall is a Morgan Hill-based freelance reporter and columnist.