

## South Valley theater group brings psycho-thriller to stage

‘The Other Place’ opens this month at Limelight Theater

By [Calvin Nuttall](#) January 5, 2026



“The Other Place” characters Juliana (played by Roberta Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen) and Dr. Teller (Amanda Ellis) practice at a recent rehearsal for the production that opens Jan. 16 at Limelight Theater. Photo: Chris Foster

Limelight Theater will present “The Other Place,” a psychological thriller that challenges audiences to distinguish reality from delusion, opening Jan. 16.

The play centers on Juliana Smithton, a 52-year-old neurologist specializing in brain disease research whose life takes a disorienting turn as her brilliant mind begins betraying her. The production runs through early February at Limelight’s venue at 16300 Condit Road in Morgan Hill.

“The whole experience of the audience is essentially a psychological jigsaw puzzle,” said Peter Mandel, who plays Juliana’s husband Ian and co-produces the show with Emily Shem-Tov. “The show itself is about the audience discovering what’s happening alongside the characters.”

The narrative is structured around a sales presentation as Juliana pitches a new miracle drug to an audience of doctors—a drug that promises to bring an end to a neurological disease affecting millions worldwide. But that structure quickly devolves into flashbacks and delusions, leaving the audience to piece together what is real and what is in her head.

“The fascinating thing for the audience is figuring out: is this reality or is this one of her delusions?” said Roberta Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen, who portrays Juliana. “It’s not always 100% clear.”

Director Bryan Freeman describes the unconventional structure as purposefully jarring, with no smooth transitions between scenes.

“It’s meant to be a cerebral piece,” Freeman said. “The playwright provides transitions that lead the audience into a disjointed effect. That is the world of the play.”

Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen calls Juliana a “dream role” that allows her to explore a wide emotional range.

“She’s funny, she tells jokes, she cries, she laughs, she yells, she screams,” Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen said. “You get to see an amazing peek into her psyche.”



Pictured are the cast of Limelight Theater’s upcoming production of “The Other Place”: Peter Mandel (playing the character Ian), Amanda Ellis (Dr. Teller), Roberta Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen (Juliana), Bri Hunter (Laurel/Woman) and John Bernard De Leon (The Man). Photo: Chris Foster

The production explores Juliana's complicated relationships with her daughter Laurel, played by Bri Hunter, and husband Ian. Laurel's voice is heard only from offstage, leaving the audience uncertain if she is even real or an artifact of Juliana's degrading psyche.

"We only hear her voice during the show," Hunter said. "It's fun to play. I haven't ever really played a character that is all offstage, and it's fun to use my voice in all these different aspects."

Ian, an oncologist, struggles to support his wife through her crisis while grappling with his own limitations. As a cancer doctor, he hopes Juliana's symptoms stem from a treatable brain tumor rather than something more devastating.

"He's very committed to his spouse, no matter how challenging her circumstances have become," Mandel said. "But he's faced with enormous challenges in terms of what to do, how to do it."

The play's title "The Other Place" refers to Juliana's family's Cape Cod home, built by her great-grandfather, a place steeped in memories both nostalgic and traumatic. It becomes a prominent setting for Juliana's flashbacks as the mystery unravels and the audience is given a glimpse into what really happened there.

"Clearly she attaches a lot of love and positive feelings to the other place, but it's also where some trauma happens too," Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen said.

The producers emphasized the production's minimalistic, abstract design serves the story's ambiguous nature, and the intimate Limelight venue places audiences within feet of the actors, creating an immersive experience.

"There's no hiding," Shem-Tov said. "You are there with her. You're going to see every moment, all the laughs, all the crying. You're going to leave thinking about it and questioning it."

While Juliana's specific affliction is never named explicitly, it calls to mind real-world neurological conditions such as dementia that impair memory and cognitive function.

"For those of you who don't know, over 55 million people live with dementia worldwide," Freeman said. "Sixty-five percent of dementia-related deaths are women, and by 2060, dementia cases are expected to double. So the effects of this character affect most Americans in some way, shape or form."

Both Freeman and Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen drew from personal experience, having watched their own grandmothers struggle with similar conditions.

"I hope the audience will be moved by the story and that it will engender conversation about relationships and this terrible disease," Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen said.

Despite the heavy subject matter, the cast promises "moments of light" and humor woven throughout the play.

"I hope they're not afraid to laugh," Vinkhuyzen Rasmussen said. "Whenever they feel the urge to laugh, they should laugh, because there are funny things and crazy things that happen. That's a part of living with someone with dementia too, being able to find the humor and be able to laugh about some of it as much as possible."

Freeman hopes audiences will walk away with a new perspective on aging and memory loss after following Juliana through her conflicts, struggles, acceptance and reconciliation.

“At the end of it, there is a beautiful sense of self-realization and discovery through the confusion and the loss, in terms of accepting what she has,” Freeman said. “I hope [the audience] find the acceptance of the character and the beauty that comes with that.”

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [svct.org/2026\\_otherplace](https://svct.org/2026_otherplace).

*Calvin Nuttall is a Morgan Hill-based freelance writer.*