

Winning cast of 'Sylvia' romps into theater-goers' hearts at Camarillo Skyway Playhouse

Rita Moran, Theater critic Published 4:25 p.m. PT April 12, 2018



(Photo: CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/PAMELA NEWMAN PHOTOGRAPHY)

With a woof and a wiggle that endear many pet pups to humans, "Sylvia" bounds onto the Camarillo Skyway Playhouse stage and into the hearts of the audience.

Camarillo's production of the A.R. Gurney giggle-rousing comedy hits the right bonding notes as the animated dog tagged Sylvia is found abandoned in a park by a midlife-crisis-suffering man, Greg. Naturally, he brings her home to the apartment he shares with his wife, Kate, who has found new purpose as a teacher now that their grown children have gone on to their own new lives.

Greg has lost interest in his current job, Kate is fascinated with hers and Sylvia is rolling over with joy at the prospect of someone who will be devoted to her. What could possibly go wrong?

Gurney's popular play gives the "starring" role to Sylvia, who is irresistibly played by Genevieve Levin, with every wiggle, sniff and leap onto the family couch sending Greg into ecstasy and driving Kate to distraction.

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Joining the winning cast with Levin are Todd Tickner as Greg, L.J. Stevens as Kate, and Bill Sweeney as everybody else. Tickner has that touch of dazed loneliness that's totally buoyed by the go-for-broke Sylvia. He manages to make the role not only very funny, but also in its own way convincingly touching.

Stevens, despite being the "villain" in Sylvia's new life and eventually the unreasonable obstacle in Fred's convoluted situation, comes into her own when she finds out that Fred would rather stay home with Sylvia than join his wife for weeks in England while she pursues her studies. He'd be happy to tag along, if Sylvia can go too, but the British are so devoted to their own dogs that they require a months-long quarantine time before any foreign canines are allowed on their island. The enormity of Fred's devotion to Sylvia eventually is one doggie-step too far and brings out the spicy side of Kate who in desperation can give as well as she gets.

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From left, Todd Tickner star as Greg, L.J. Stevens plays Kate and Genevieve Levin plays the title role in "Sylvia," on stage through May 6 at the Camarillo Skyway Playhouse. (Photo: CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/PAMELA NEWMAN PHOTOGRAPHY)

With the juicy opportunity to play Tom, Phyllis and Leslie, in assorted scenes, Sweeney makes the most of it. His Tom, who meets Greg in the doggie park, has a casual swagger of assurance that probably suits his male dog just fine. As Phyllis, one one of Kate's friends, he delivers an exaggerated but quite funny characterization of a woman who is elegant in a slightly haughty way, but easily disturbed by Sylvia's high-spirited presence. And he really shines as the therapist who seems a bit of each sex, tailored to look and act that way, he-she says to better work with a variety of clients.

One small caveat for folks who might think a comedy with a dog in the title role might be appropriate fare for children. There are a lot of "four-letter" words deftly delivered at what could be considered appropriate moments. Some kids might be diverted enough by the joy of watching Sylvia romp around the room, but others might not be used to such talk.

Kimberly Demmary, often seen gracing local stages herself, directs the show with a fine sense of the absurd that happily infects the cast. A handsome set fills the stage and diverse background music reflects the fast-moving moods of the comedy.

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If you go

What: "Sylvia," the Camarillo Skyway Playhouse production of the A.R. Gurney comedy

When: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, and 2 p.m. Sundays through May 6

Where: 330 Skyway Drive, Camarillo (<http://330%20Skyway%20Drive,%20Camarillo>)

Cost: \$20; students, seniors 60+ and military \$15; children 12 and younger \$10

Information: 388-5716 or www.skywayplayhouse.org (<http://www.skywayplayhouse.org>).

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