

arts & culture

# 'Exit Laughing' Leaves Audiences Aching With Delight

The uproarious stage comedy runs through Aug. 24 at The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol's latest comedy, Paul Elliot's "Exit Laughing," provides feel-good fun in a sitcom package.

Billed as "Golden Girls" meets "Steel Magnolias," "Exit Laughing" is a story about four Southern belles — Connie, Leona, Millie and Mary — who have been getting together for the past 30 years for gossip and girl time at their weekly game night. When Mary passes away, the remaining ladies "borrow" her ashes from the funeral home for one last night together.

"I haven't laughed that hard in a long time," said Sharon Becker, a Village of Bonita resident. "I had tears rolling down my face because I was laughing so hard."

For this production, The Studio's black box theater utilizes the same proscenium-style seating used for the previous month's production of "Little Shop of Horrors." Coupled with witty dialogue, fixed set and archetypal characters, the arrangement invokes the feeling of being part of a live studio audience for a '90s sitcom. The audiences' giggles and guffaws served as the play's built-in laugh track.

The entire play takes place in the living room of Connie's quintessential Southern home, a pink and yellow pastel space filled with wood furniture and knickknacks.

Connie, played by Studio newcomer Robin R. McGee, is a level-headed, middle-aged divorcee. As the play opens, Connie's over-emotional daughter, Rachel, played by Jada Griffin, is fit to be tied over being stood up by her date, Bobby, that afternoon.

As Rachel laments that she will be single and alone forever "like her mother," Connie



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expresses her own sadness about the recent passing of her friend, Mary, and how this will be the first night their friends group meets for bridge without Mary. Connie is joined by outspoken friend Leona, played by Kathleen Puls Andrade, and the ditzy Millie, played by Kelly Bashar, from the Emmy Award-winning miniseries " Fargo."

Upon Millie's arrival, she reveals that she brought an unexpected guest — Mary. More specifically, she brought Mary's urn, which she stole from the funeral home.

"I just picked her up," Millie says in defense of the body snatching. "It was my day to carpool."

Connie, Leona and Rachel react to the reveal with varying degrees of shock, horror, and tomfoolery as they try to figure out how to get through the night without being arrested. But the group soon realizes they got into more than they bargained for, because their dearly departed friend has one final message to pass on to her friends.

"It was just so funny," said Sharon Gage, of the Village of Pennecamp. "Some lines were just totally unexpected."

Standouts of the night included Bashar's performance as Millie, who's



Submitted photo

"Exit Laughing," a feel-good comedy about three Southern ladies coping with the loss of their dearly departed friend, runs through Aug. 24 at The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol.

empty-headed antics many likened to Betty White's as Rose from the "Golden Girls," and Trevor Spence as Bobby, the boy who stood Rachel up.

The segment in which Bobby meets the rest of the women for the first time earned the most laughs from the crowd. It also served as the catalyst for the play's transition from saucy sitcom to poignant drama as Connie, Leona and Millie are forced to come to terms with the loss of their friend.

For Becker and Gage, the play was as hilarious as it was relatable. The pair attended the show with their own group of golden girls: Patty Wilken, of the Village of Charlotte; Suzie Grondin, of the Village of Amelia; and Cindy McNerney, of the Village of Pennecamp. Much like the women in the play, the friends get together often for events like golf, games, trivia and shows, like "Exit Laughing."

"There wasn't a bad part" McNerney said of the show and its actors. "They were all great." "Exit Laughing" runs through Aug. 24 at The Studio. Tickets start at \$40. To buy or find out more, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

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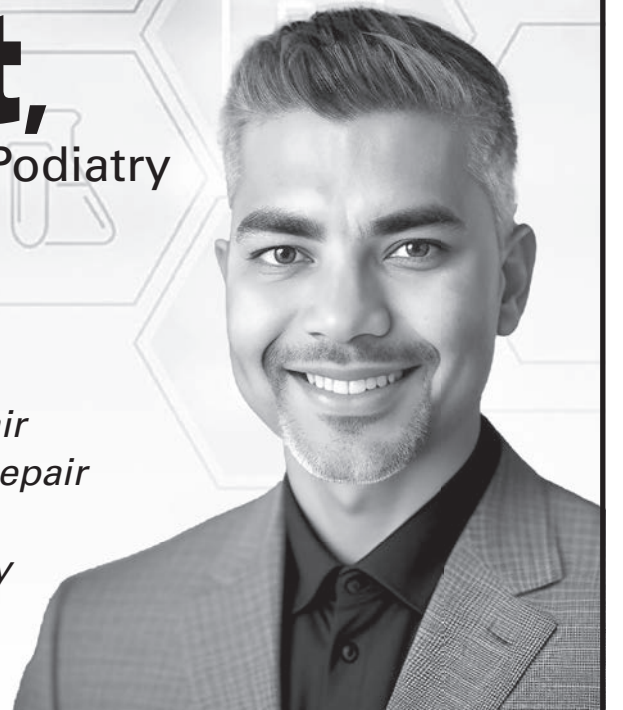
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