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## **OLD-TIME MELODRAMA CONTINUES TO DRAW CROWDS TO CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST**

### **Newly Upgraded Facility Attracts Visitors to Santa Maria Valley's Theater Scene**

SANTA MARIA, CA— An hour's drive north of Santa Barbara lies the rural hamlet of Oceano. The area's mild climate, towering sand dunes and seaside campgrounds are particularly popular with tourists escaping the summer heat of California's Central Valley. But Oceano's acclaim extends still further. For 36 years The Great American Melodrama & Vaudeville, located along the town's main drag on famed Highway 1, has treated theater-goers from all walks of life to, as one patron put it, "lighthearted and carefree giddy abandon."

Indeed, folksy piano tunes, cabaret tables and sawdust-covered floors greet guests as they file inside for a show. But the audience is in for a lot more than a festive atmosphere. Here, professional performers from throughout the United States gather to present top-notch productions of great classic musicals, original plays and Victorian melodramas, some of which invite "boo and hiss" audience participation. Each show also includes an old-time vaudeville revue full of song, dance and comedy.

The current season includes "Soup du Jour," a musical tribute to 1930s screwball comedies that runs now through June 12; "Butch Cassidy and the Sunburnt Kid," a wild west world of melodrama and parody full of song, dance and comedy that runs from June 16 to September 17; "Lost at Sea," a classic 19<sup>th</sup>-century melodrama that runs July 14 to September 18; and "The Werewolf of Dr. Oz," a comedic musical packed with song parodies and pop culture references that runs September 22 through November 13. The theater's annual "Holiday Extravaganza" production, which runs November 17 through December 31, is also extremely popular.

Owner John Schlenker, a former high school teacher who created the Melodrama out of an abandoned drugstore in 1975, has made 2011 a year of renewal for the business. Together, with his wife Lynne and a talented crew, Schlenker has constructed a new foyer for the building; rebuilt the wooden pew seating that was donated by a church in the 1970s; refreshed the back patio; and adorned the front with new window cases that display theater playbills of past and present shows.

Even the in-house pub has been remodeled. However, management is quick to point out that it still offers the fairly priced and ever-popular jumbo hot dogs, barbecue beef sandwiches, baked potato bar, beer, wine, desserts and other snacks and that the colorful performers still work the counter! Open 30 minutes prior to shows and during two intermissions, the pub is a great way for families to create a complete dinner-theater evening.

Not to be confused with the Italian opera term, "melodramma," the term "melodrama" refers to a dramatic work that exaggerates plot and characters in order to appeal to the emotions. "Melodrama" is also used in scholarly and historical musical contexts to refer to dramas of the 18th and 19th centuries in which orchestral music or song was used to accompany the action. The term originated from the early 19th-century French word "mélodrame," which in turn is derived from the Greek word "melos" (music) and the French term "drame" (drama).

**The Great American Melodrama & Vaudeville** is located at 1863 Front Street in Oceano, California. For current show schedules and other information, the public may contact: (805) 489-2499, [www.americanmelodrama.com](http://www.americanmelodrama.com).

Oceano's Great American Melodrama & Vaudeville is part of a larger theater and music scene located throughout Santa Maria Valley. The nationally acclaimed **Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts (PCPA)** remains the only professional resident company on the Central Coast and stages fine classic and contemporary live theater plays. Audiences enjoy three excellent venues: The 450-seat, thrust-stage Marian Theatre and the flexible-seating, studio-style Severson Theatre—both at Santa Maria's Allan Hancock College Performing Arts Center; and the Festival Theatre in Solvang.

Contact (805) 922-8313 or visit [www.pcpa.org](http://www.pcpa.org).

Meanwhile, the **Santa Maria Civic Theatre** is the oldest theater group in the region, and offers comedies, dramas and children's productions. Located at 1660 N. McClelland Drive in Santa Maria, the theater may be contacted at (805) 922-4442 or visit [www.smct.org](http://www.smct.org).

Newer on the scene, the **Santa Maria Philharmonic Society** has been turning heads with its development of high caliber classical concerts as well as educational programs for children. Music Director John Farrer also works frequently as a guest conductor in England, and acts as director of the Bakersfield Symphony as well.

For information about Santa Maria Valley attractions, local lodging, wine tasting and more, visit [www.santamaria.com](http://www.santamaria.com) or call the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce & Visitor and Convention Bureau at (800) 331-3779.

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