Cabirio Stage chases the rainbow in ‘La Cage Aux Folles’

By WALLACE BAINE

CABIRIO STAGE CHASES THE RAINBOW

(THROUGH AUG. 31, Opening Friday, Crocker Theater on the campus of Cabrillo College. For showtimes and ticket information go to www.cabiriostage.com )

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If the recent Supreme Court rulings on the marriage rights of same-sex couples has injected a kind of levitation for gay people, then there is certainly many — gay and straight — who couldn’t remember the 1980s. The period was a time of ultra-conservative, ultra-religious and ultra-right-wing politics, paired with the Reagan-Bush Revolution in full swing, the Moral Majority at its apogee, and the AIDS epidemic just beginning to explode.

The notion of gay being allowed to legally marry was about as likely as NASA landing on Neptune.

But, then again, there was “La Cage Aux Folles.”

Harvey Fierstein’s now classic musical, with music by Jerry Herman, made its debut on Broadway in August of 1983 and, with its gay culture hadn’t found a foothold of acceptance yet, enjoyed the irony of its timing. Here was an avant-garde and one-stage spectacular full of songs and laughs, and of its very center was a committed, long-term gay couple gazedly trying to conform to heterosexual culture, much less level of love for their own.

This week, “La Cage” opens the summer musical season at Cabirio Stage in a radically different world than when it opened in 83. But the show remains as it always has been — a family affair, albeit with a lot of drag queens.

Those who’ve never seen the musical might remember the 1980 movie version “The Birdcage,” starring Robin Williams and Nathan Lane. But that Harvey Fierstein’s “La Cage” were based on the 1973 French play by Jean Poiret. Bette the story of Georges and Alain, who run the infamous St. Tropez nightclub La Cage Aux Folles, the latter as the club’s emcee, the latter as one of its featured drag performers.

The couple has since won, George Henry’s youthful identification, who now an adult and eager to marry a girl who happens to be the daughter of a high-profile conservative moral who wants to shut down the drag club. Despite

Tony Panighetti (left center in purple dress) and Curt Denham are Albin and Georges in Cabirio Stage’s production of ‘La Cage Aux Folles.’