

South Valley

Paisley waves

SVCT's presents Broadway hit of biblical proportion

https://southvalley.com/paisley-waves/?fbclid=IwAR3_zrygZc-_KJqjJ8_mq8LYuUqUU0cSikOy_raXh9GRjqtoSZLS5d23rPE

February 22, 2019 - Susan Rife



ROCK OUT South Valley Civic Theatre rolls with its winter production, 'Godspell.' Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

A teen cast for South Valley Civic Theatre's production of Stephen Schwartz's 1971 off-Broadway hit "Godspell" may be the most genius theater decision ever, as their youthful exuberance spills off the stage in brightly colored paisley waves.

At the heart of this pop-rock musical are the most feel-good of the parables of Jesus, mostly from the Gospel of Matthew, told by Andy Gonzalez as Jesus. His enthusiastic young followers respond with fun, uptempo songs as they dance through a brightly-colored playground, complete with swings and slide. Interestingly, many of the songs' lyrics come from the Episcopal Church hymnal.

Gonzalez, who at 19 is at the top of the teen cast's age range, brings a grounded maturity to the role, and his voice is just to die for. Sporting a creditable Afro, he beams a near-constant benevolent smile as he coaxes his disciples out of their old ways of thinking and into the new teachings he brings, along with new behaviors—primary, of course, being the commandments to love God and your neighbor. In the second act, he grows more frustrated with his followers' seeming lack of understanding of the point he's trying to make, especially as he recognizes his own time running out and the long road ahead for the new Christians. There's a bit of focus on the events leading up to the crucifixion, but really nothing directly pointing to the Resurrection.

Gonzalez is joined by several others in the cast with exceptionally strong voices. Natalie Fitzgibbons knocks it out of the theater on the musical's best-known number, "Day by Day," and leads beautiful harmonies on "By My Side" with Kendall Eves and Caroline Drayton. Lucia Kaelin, in a funky fur vest over a wildly printed dress, puts a torch singer's smokey spin on "Turn Back O' Man." Sean O'Connor handles the thankless role of Judas well, singing "We Beseech Thee." Charlie Grimm, playing John the Baptist, gives a heartfelt rendering to "On the Willows."

Directed by Megan Griffin with vocal direction by Lynette Oliphant, the cast ably handles the tricky Schwartz harmonies, which go far beyond four-part into practically another dimension. Music director Mike Rubino leads a snappy live band of Kirk Berkland, Tony Burmudez, Tom Dossa, Chris Eves, Greg Goebel, Jonathan Heinz and Holly Lasky, and believe me, live music goes a long way in brightening up any stage production.

Alicia Corso's costume designs are both age- and era-appropriate, with bright florals and paisleys, fringed vests and daisy crowns nearly outshining the cast's beaming smiles.

The show was last presented by SVCT in 1998. The current production is part of SVCT's 50th anniversary season.

South Valley Civic Theatre presents "Godspell." Music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. Performances through Mar. 2 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey St., Morgan Hill. Tickets \$16-\$25. For tickets and information, visit svct.org.

Teen musical “Godspell” brings message of love and forgiveness to SVCT stage

<https://morganhilllife.com/2019/02/14/curtain-up-theater-review-by-camille-bounds-teen-musical-godspell-brings-message-of-love-and-forgiveness-to-svct-stage/?fbclid=IwAR1mRDPZzTWsBQ-yaQ5YX3Bcv2PISmr6apQAl8CyduRCk-7BtphoeqhlyUU>

by Camille Bounds | Feb 14, 2019



South Valley Civic Theatre’s “Godspell” teen musical plays through March 2 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse on the corner of East Dunne Avenue and Monterey Road. Tickets for shows are now available at www.svct.org. *Photo by Marty Cheek*

Be sure to arrive relaxed with a good night's sleep and never mind your usual cup of coffee. You won't need it when you see the South Valley Civic Theatre's teen musical "Godspell." The hippie-era show will keep you in an upbeat mental alert space throughout the performance.

South Valley Civic Theatre includes this energetic production of "Godspell" as part of its 50th anniversary season. In 1971 the show ran off-Broadway for 2,000 performances. It was followed by a Broadway revamped revival in October 2011 that ran for two years followed by a popular movie version in 1973. This SVCT production is taken from the revised 2011 Broadway production.

Stephen Schwartz composed music and lyrics from a study his friend Michael Tebelak was submitting as his thesis for his doctorate. The story is based on Jesus surrounded by his disciples while he teaches his parables from the gospels of Matthew, John and Luke. It takes bring in the lessons of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son and has a heart-rending depiction of Judas's betrayal and the Resurrection.

There are 20 teen performers and according to "Godspell" Producer Michelle Griffin the average age is 14. They never leave the stage throughout the show. They are truly amazing and emit a continuous briskness of energy and activeness that continually keeps the audience's attention.

The music and lyrics are delivered with a simple laid back charm with a richness in harmony. Mike Rubino leads the SVCT orchestra never missing a cue in a complicated score.

Andy Gonzalez as Jesus showed a vocal smoothness and his gentle and, at times, humorous delivery fit the moment. Charlie Grimm as John the Baptist and Sean O'Connor as Judas are commendable

Megan Griffin directs with deep detail and kept her cast under fine control. She and the show's Assistant Director Christine Carillo also offered the delightful, well-done choreography that often steals the show.

SVCT's "Godspell" is a supremely memorable delight for a night out with an ancient story reminding us of the important message of love and forgiveness.

DETAILS

"Godspell"

Produced by The South Valley Civic Theatre

Where: Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 5th and Montgomery Streets, Morgan Hill

Running Time: 2 hours thirty minutes with one fifteen minute intermission

Tickets: \$16-\$25

For tickets, reservations and information visit: www.svct.org

Tickets can also be purchased at the door on a space availability basis.

South Valley

Righteous rockout

SVCT's Godspell musical teaches through parables

<https://southvalley.com/righteous-rockout/?fbclid=IwAR0AmkQu3D4sVtp6rJQOgNEFgfdM9BDox6HBmx4yfTb9VnqkwzskIX9m2BQ>

February 6, 2019 - Susan Rife



GOOD NEWS South Valley Civic Theatre's teen musical 'Godspell' runs Feb. 8-March 2 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Photo: Chris Foster

Like its 1970s compadre, "Jesus Christ Superstar," "Godspell" focuses on Jesus as seen through a 20th-century rock score.

Unlike "Jesus Christ Superstar," "Godspell" focuses on Jesus's teachings more than the drama of the last days of his life. Its title is a throwback to the Anglo-Saxon word "godspell," meaning "good news," and the musical gives Jesus the chance to teach a group of his passionate followers through his parables, mostly but not exclusively taken from the Gospel according to Matthew.

As part of its 50th anniversary season, South Valley Civic Theatre will present "Godspell" as its teen musical, starring Andy Gonzalez as Jesus, Charlie Grimm as John the Baptist and Sean O'Connor as Judas.

"At first I was like, Jesus, OK, this is going to be big shoes to fill," said Gonzalez, a recent Sobrato High School graduate who came to acting only a couple of years ago when he performed in Sobrato's production of "Rent." After appearing in SVCT's adult production of "Follies," he was invited to audition for "Godspell," thanks to his big voice.

"He auditioned with 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' which fit perfectly with the kind of music 'Godspell' has," said director Megan Griffin. "He has a beautiful voice and a sweet demeanor."

"Usually Jesus is portrayed as very stoic," said Gonzalez, who sports an impressive afro. "You never see him playful or angry."

Producer Michelle Griffin (Megan's mother) described the cast of 19 teenagers ages 12-19 as "interfaith."

Megan said she plans to incorporate more of her Catholic theology into the song "On the Willows," to make it more of a Passion Play with stations of the cross and Jesus's resurrection addressed more directly than in some productions.

The show, by composer Stephen Schwartz, opened off-Broadway in 1971 with a folk music score; its 2011 revival on Broadway offered a more soft-rock experience, said Michelle, whose own love for the show dates back to her days in Catholic school, where a "modern nun" sang the show's best-known song, "Day By Day."

"That's a big part of my makings as a Catholic," she said.

The show is a challenge for its teen cast, said Megan. First of all, everyone in the cast is onstage throughout the show. And the music sometimes runs to seven-part harmonies.

SVCT has produced the show twice before. In planning the 50th anniversary season, audience polls showed "Godspell" as "a very strong favorite," said Michelle.

The cast will be wearing '70s-era hippie clothing, with Gonzalez in all white as Jesus. The action takes place in a park with a swing set and slides. *SVCT's 'Godspell' runs Feb. 8-March 2 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey St. Tickets \$16-\$25. For tickets and information, visit svct.org.*

South Valley Civic Theatre showcases spiritual message with popular hippie-era 'Godspell'

<https://morganhilllife.com/2019/01/27/entertainment-south-valley-civic-theatre-showcases-spiritual-message-with-popular-hippie-era-godspell/>

by Marty Cheek | Jan 27, 2019



Photo by Marty Cheek The cast of "Godspell" after a recent rehearsal. The play opens Feb. 8 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

The 19-member cast ranging in ages 13 to 18 comes from Morgan Hill, Gilroy, Hollister and San Jose

When Andy Gonzalez came home after auditioning for “Godspell,” the South Valley Civic Theatre’s teen musical show that opens Feb. 8, his mother asked him how it went. It turned out her prayers were answered.

“I’m not too strongly Catholic, but my mother is,” said the 18-year-old Gavilan Community College student. “So she asked what part I got in the show. And I said, ‘Um, Jesus.’ And she goes ‘Jesus! We’re going to have to see the show.’ She was very excited.”

A favorite of community theater, “Godspell” first opened off-Broadway in 1971. Composed by Stephen Schwartz with the book by John-Michael Tebelak, the musical tells the story of Jesus teaching his followers using a series of parables from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. The parables are told using a variety of musical genres, including pop, folk rock, gospel, hymns, and vaudeville.

Gonzalez’s portrayal of Jesus on the stage will show an “easy-going and fun-loving” side, he said.

“Since the show is so flexible, you can go any direction,” he said. “You can do a funny Jesus or you can do it showing his serious side. But since we are such a tight group, I feel like I’m just hanging out with my buddies and going through my teachings and trying to spread a message of love and peace.”

SVCT has produced “Godspell” twice before. The show was selected for the nonprofit theater group’s 50th anniversary season because of its popularity in the past performances, said Michelle Griffin who is producing the musical with Adrienne Wilkinson and Joy Reynolds. Her daughter, Megan Griffin, is the show’s director.

“It has amazing music,” Michelle said. “Even some of the songs went on to become top hits like ‘Day by Day’ and ‘Prepare Ye.’ They’re songs that people recognize.”

Doing research for show, the Griffins discovered the interesting origin of how “Godspell” came to be created. Tebelak was a hippie in the 1960s who grew up enjoying performing in the theater but also felt a calling to be a Methodist minister.

“He did not feel terribly welcomed in his church because of his long hair and ratty appearance,” Michelle said. “He had this inspiration to write this show to sort of bring to a different audience the message of Jesus.”

The show got its start in 1970 as Tebelak’s master’s thesis project at Carnegie Mellon University, according to Music Theater International.

His original version was performed by students from Carnegie Mellon’s Music Department. Tebelak directed the show, maintaining much of the original student cast, for a two-week, 10-performance run at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, which opened Feb. 24, 1971.

The student actor version of “Godspell” was seen by professional producers who liked the concept so much, they decided to transfer the show to off-Broadway and hired Schwartz to re-score the music.

The SVCT version of “Godspell” is a version of the modernized Broadway revival which opened Oct. 13, 2011 and played through June 24, 2012. It will be inclusive in representing the various religious beliefs of the South Valley, Michelle said.

“We have a cast with many faiths. We have Jewish and Mormon actors as well as Catholics,” she said. “We made (the show) a safe place where we decided we want to tell the story and not proselytize to the kids. Actually, I think that has made it turn out very well because we have one of the closest casts I have ever seen. It’s turning out to be a very tight show and we’re very happy with it.”

The 19-member cast ranging in ages 13 to 18 comes from Morgan Hill, Gilroy, Hollister and San Jose. They perform on a stage set that is very simple, a playground swing and slide placed in front of a chain-link fence.

“The actors are very mature and every single one of them is on stage the entire show,” Megan said. “So they have a lot of material they’re working on whether they’re saying their lines or up there doing their blocking and choreography. They’re impressive because they can hang. It’s not easy material.”

Even though the show has a hippie-era feel to it, the message of love and tolerance is one that resonates through the ages, she said.

“The story is basically just Jesus’s re-telling the parables with some of his disciples and go through his whole journey and his teachings,” she said. “At the end of the show, it leads to the Last Supper where Judas betrays Jesus. We’re actually going to do a little mini-Passion play in the show where there’s a crucifixion and a resurrection. There are some very moving moments at the end of the show.”

SVCT encourages all religious faiths in the region to consider taking their youth groups and other members to see the performances of “Godspell,” Michelle said. Group ticket sale discounts are available.

“It’s a really good show to experience with other people who share your same sense of core beliefs,” she said. “It tends to sometimes lean a little clownish, and some people might take it as being disrespectful, but we are making sure that we’re doing a very reverent productions.”

The upbeat music, dancing, and wise-cracks made by Jesus and the disciples will appeal to a modern audience, Megan said.

“There’s definitely a lot of light, funny moments in the show,” she said.