

# South Valley

## ‘Rock of Ages’: Teenaged cast brings big-hair era to life

by Susan Rife

[https://southvalley.com/teenaged-cast-brings-big-hair-era-to-life/?fbclid=IwAR0IJdVUbxRrbwskH38x9mz0O332FhxmGjErUG89eo5mDcJmV\\_6hPs8QgUE](https://southvalley.com/teenaged-cast-brings-big-hair-era-to-life/?fbclid=IwAR0IJdVUbxRrbwskH38x9mz0O332FhxmGjErUG89eo5mDcJmV_6hPs8QgUE)



ROCK THIS TOWN South Valley Civic Theatre's "Rock of Ages" features savvy casting and strong voices. Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

There's nothing like the enthusiasm of young people for the music of an earlier generation to ratchet up the excitement of a community theater musical production.

Savvy casting, strong voices and solid acting in South Valley Civic Theatre's production of the high school edition of *Rock of Ages* make up for any shortcomings on the technical side, as director/choreographer Megan Griffin keeps a loose hand on a huge cast of teenagers. Decked out in '80s "fashion" and some truly astonishing wigs, the teenagers bring the era of big-hair and heavy metal bands to raucous life.

*Rock of Ages* tells the story of a starry-eyed naïf from Paola, Kansas, who heads to Los Angeles' famous Sunset Strip over her parents' objections to become a star. Instead, she meets an aspiring rock musician at the nightclub where she gets a job, finds herself also smitten by the actual Rock Star who breaks her heart, and ultimately comes to understand things about herself and the wider world.

Griffin has cast her three principals—small town girl Sherrie Christian, would-be rocker Drew Boley and rock star Stacey Jaxx—with three teenagers who work their way confidently around the stage, the songs and each other.

Emily Pember brings a wonderfully nuanced, giddy sweetness paired with some sensible Kansas realism to Sherrie, and her ballads, both solo and paired with her competing love interests, are lovely.

Andy Gonzalez plays Drew, the Bourbon Club busboy who dreams of life behind a guitar and a microphone; Gonzalez is so relaxed in the rocker persona it's like he stepped out of an earlier decade.

Gannon Janisch has tremendous fun with the role of rock star Stacey Jaxx, who travels with a coterie of screaming groupie girls. Outfitted in leather chaps and a fur vest over his bare chest, he can barely be seen behind the curtain of hair as he moves through the expected adulation with an air of privilege and self-absorption.

The love triangle between Sherrie, Drew and Stacey sometimes takes a back seat to a plot line involving the sale of the Bourbon Club to a pair of German developers (Isabella Rosal and PJ Crocker) who convince the mayor (Catherine Drayton) to clean up the Sunset Strip from its "sex, drugs and rock 'n roll" reputation. Rosal is hilarious, if occasionally unintelligible, as the imperious Hilda Klinemann, while Crocker as her cowering son Franz comes into his own later in the show and steals a couple of scenes, most notably "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," in which the cast, outfitted in hot pink Spandex, leaps about in '80s Jazzercise form.

Jenna Hernandez provides the show's solid underpinning with her comic narration as Lonny, the Bourbon Room's manager. Lauren DeRosa is sassy as the mayor's assistant-turned-anti-development-protestor Anita Bath, and Austin Vandecoeverying is cool as a cucumber under a blow-dried, streaked blond coiffure and matching 'stache as beleaguered club owner Dennis Dupree.

A six-piece live band led by vocal and orchestra director Michael Rubino is careful not to overpower the actors with solid renditions of "I Wanna Know What Love Is," "Every Rose Has Its Thorns," "Don't Stop Believin'," "We Built This City" and "Waiting for a Girl Like You."

## **“Rock Of Ages” will give those who remember the decade of excess a moment of nostalgia**

**By Camille Bounds**

[https://gilroylife.com/2020/02/24/curtain-up-theater-review-by-camille-bounds-svcts-rock-of-ages-has-todays-teens-revisiting-the-80s/?fbclid=IwAR0zGyCxJ5wSTkExErPp3ZNzJFdkQ5LS6OLkb5LRm\\_rIZ6AmKzA-cR2Cnsc](https://gilroylife.com/2020/02/24/curtain-up-theater-review-by-camille-bounds-svcts-rock-of-ages-has-todays-teens-revisiting-the-80s/?fbclid=IwAR0zGyCxJ5wSTkExErPp3ZNzJFdkQ5LS6OLkb5LRm_rIZ6AmKzA-cR2Cnsc)



This South Valley Civic Theatre production of “Rock Of Ages” offers a charming, dedicated talented cast that really enjoy being a part of this production.

South Valley Civic Theatre brings “Rock Of Ages” to the Morgan Hill Playhouse Stage. The show is a huge, brassy, energetic tribute to classic 1980s rock, with over the top ballads to the harsh glamour and rough energy of the Sunset Strip.

This jukebox musical features 28 hits from the decade including “I Wanna Rock,” “We Built This City,” “Don’t Stop Believin,” “Every Rose Has A Thorn,” “Wanted Dead Or Alive,” “I Wanna Know What Love is,” and “Here I Go Again.” The young performers do a fine job belting out the spine-tingling big-hair ballads. The 40 dedicated teens from the South Valley area give their all in this entertaining show, a family-friendly version of the

Broadway hit. The cast move with a vibrancy and liveliness similar to that of a runaway train.

Leading characters in this boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-gets-girl story are Andy Gonzalez, Emily Pember, Gannon Janisch and Jenna Hernandez. They all have wonderful voices and deliver their songs with gusto and feeling.

Director/choreographer Megan Griffin takes her cast on a journey that keeps the audience attention. Michelle Griffin’s colorful costumes, hair and make-up and set designs are timely and interesting. Lighting designer Dylan Maack blends the sets colorfully without missing a cue. Mike Rubino’s orchestra carries the show with well-played music by Ethan Popp with the book by Chris D’Arienzo.

“Rock Of Ages” will give those in the audience who remember the decade of excess a moment of nostalgia. And those roaming this planet later on will get an interesting look at what was a fascinating time for American rock music.

# South Valley

## Teens take the stage in 'Rock of Ages'

by Susan Rife

<https://southvalley.com/teens-take-the-stage-in-rock-of-ages/?fbclid=IwAR2M0mr8mVhcfj4oy6dok2g2T-CINd8lfJHhQPqa1169JHdynGXUHEd0MJE>



VINTAGE FASHION South Valley Civic Theatre's production of "Rock of Ages" opens Feb. 21. Photo: Chris Foster

The cast of the jukebox musical *Rock of Ages* was born literally in a different century from the music they'll sing in South Valley Civic Theatre's teen production.

But they are thrilled at the chance to sing such glam-band hits as "Don't Stop Believin'," "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," "I Want to Know What Love Is" and "We Built This City." Hits by Starship, Foreigner, Journey, Bon Jovi, Joan Jett and Poison are sprinkled throughout this story of a small-town girl trying to make it as an actress in Los Angeles, who meets an aspiring musician working as a busboy in the Bourbon Room on Sunset Strip.

"For me, it was really about the music," said Andy Gonzalez, a 19-year-old sophomore at Gavilan College, who plays budding rocker Drew Boley.

Although he was familiar with the band names and the hard-driving rock of the 1980s, "We didn't know how iconic it was in the '80s; how influential it was to carry on in music," he said.

"All these songs tell stories; it's not like that now," said Emily Pember, who plays Sherrie Christian, the star-struck newcomer to L.A.

"The lyrics are like a poem," said Gannon Janisch, who plays the sexy rock star Stacey Jaxx, citing "Every Rose Has Its Thorn" by Poison and "Heaven" by Warren, among others.

Janisch and Pember are both 17 and high school seniors, Pember at Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill and Janisch at St. Francis Catholic High School in Watsonville. Both were born more than a quarter-century after “Rock of Ages” made its debut in Los Angeles in 1985. It moved to New York in 2008 and ran on Broadway from 2009-2015.

“My parents are really excited,” Pember said.

The teenagers are equally excited by the costumes they’ll be wearing, designed by Michelle Griffin, from crazy glam-rock wigs to vintage ‘80s fashion, “everything shredded.”

“The look of it is crazy,” said Gonzalez, whose last role at SVCT was as Jesus in *Godspell*. “Once you see everybody else’s costumes—it’s a time travel! Why would you throw away that fashion?”

Pember, whose bio at SVCT includes roles in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Shrek* and *Seussical*, has more of a classically musical theater voice, she said.

“I have to find a good balance with picking your battles vocally,” she said. “The vocals are rough but so much fun. It’s really cool to get to know a different style of theater.”

The show is being directed by Megan Griffin, with Michael Rubino as vocal/music director. A live band will bring a true rock feel to the show.

## SVCT's 'Rock of Ages' is a jukebox musical featuring hits from the '80s

Wannabe rockers and their friends try to save Sunset Strip nightclub

[https://morganhilllife.com/2020/02/11/svcts-rock-of-ages-is-a-jukebox-musical-featuring-hits-from-the-80s/?fbclid=IwAR1250C\\_MdrDZF8K\\_Y65mvZwIRMsyBRmQT98AVpT2IBrRwmyzf8mf0Kc90](https://morganhilllife.com/2020/02/11/svcts-rock-of-ages-is-a-jukebox-musical-featuring-hits-from-the-80s/?fbclid=IwAR1250C_MdrDZF8K_Y65mvZwIRMsyBRmQT98AVpT2IBrRwmyzf8mf0Kc90)



By Marty Cheek Photos by Chris Foster

Get ready to rock 'n' roll to the classic tunes of the '80s. South Valley Civic Theatre's "Rock of Ages" is a jukebox musical featuring hits from the decade famous for glam metal and big-hair bands.



Opening Feb. 21 and running until March 14, the teen musical features songs from Styx, Journey, Bon Jovi, Pat Benatar, Twisted Sister, Steve Perry, Poison and Europe. The original production ran for 2,328 performances, closing Jan. 18, 2015 as the 29th-longest running show in Broadway history.

The story is set in 1987 when an aspiring rocker named Drew Boley (played by Andy Gonzalez) works as a busboy in a Sunset Strip nightclub called the Bourbon Room. He falls instantly for a girl, Sherrie Christian (played by Emily

Pember), who just arrives in Los Angeles from a small Kansas town hoping to make it big in acting. Drew helps her to get a job as a waitress. When the nightclub is threatened to be demolished, it's up to these wannabe rockers and their band of friends to save the day with the help of rock anthems and power ballads including "Every Rose Has Its Thorn," "I Wanna Know What Love Is," "Here I Go Again," and "Don't Stop Believin'."

As Drew, Gonzalez has ambitions to become as famous as the mega-star rocker Stacey Jaxx (played by Gannon Janisch), and when Jaxx comes to perform at the Bourbon Room, he puts Drew's romance with Sherry in jeopardy.

The songs from the 1980s help to tell the story and keep the boy-meets girl, boy-loses girl plot moving, Gonzalez said.

"All the music is great," he said. "It's a show within a show. It's like a concert."

Sherrie's character develops from the band Night Ranger's song "Sister Christian" about a young woman learning that life requires a price to be paid for dreams to become a success.

"Sherrie is a small-town girl living in a lonely world," Pember said. "She wants to be an actress so she moves to L.A. and gets a job with Drew and they fall in love with each other. But then she gets fired because of Stacey Jaxx and becomes a go-go dancer, which is embarrassing for her. So her dreams don't wind up the way that she wanted them to."



Stacey Jaxx also learns a lesson from life about humility. Janisch said, "Stacy Jaxx is a hot shot. He knows that he is a famous rocker and that everyone loves him," Janisch said. "He's at first so much of a hot shot that he doesn't want to help out the person who helped him start his career."

Once Jaxx is threatened, he is forced to perform at the Bourbon Room to help the owner. That's where he meets Sherrie.

"My (character's) ego grows and grows and then it hits its peak and that's when Sherry gets fired," Janisch said. "After Sherrie exposes me as a total jerk, no one likes me anymore, no one wants me anymore, and so all I can get is a job being a Spanish (music) performer."

The appeal of the show is definitely the 1980s music which has gained popularity among today's young people because of its nostalgia, Pember said.

"I feel like I was born in the wrong time," she said. "It's cool that we get to pretend and enjoy the music. Everyone's going to have a lot of fun at this show because of all the songs and music. The music is so iconic. The audience is encouraged to sing along with the show. It's going to be really fun."

The show is set in an era that everyone loves and this is featured in the set, or the over-the-top costumes, wigs and makeup, Janisch said.

"The audience will get a lot of enjoyment out of it, whether it's the songs or the look of the stage or the characters or the dancing and acting," he said. "There's some piece of the show that everyone is going to find some enjoyment from. Theater brings everyone together but I think this show is going to bring the young and the old and everyone in between together in one big celebration."

"Rock of Ages" producer Jen Puente said SVCT's version is the "high school edition" so it will be family-friendly compared to the Broadway version.

"SVCT selected the show because it has such great name-brand recognition, and we thought it would be fun not just for the kids who hear the songs when their parents listen to them but also for our parent volunteers who get involved in the show," she said. "Even if you're a person who doesn't like musicals, you'll like this show because there are so many songs you'll recognize and love."

Other performers in the show are: Jenna Hernandez, Austin Vandecoeverying, Nathan McDonald, Leah Grifall, Catherine Drayton, Lauren DeRosa, Isabella Rosal, PJ Crocker, Jillian Puente, Riley Brown, Oliver Kaelin, Marcus Horta, Tessa Zhang, Ashleigh Perales, Sophia Bermea, Coco Crowley, Caroline Drayton, Cece Cooper, Makayla Hoiberg, Maya King, Lauren Perales, Zoe Zepeda, Kennedy Agnitsch, London McWilliams, Becca Snook, Ashton Acosta-Parson, Cierra Hawkins, Connor Rollins, Keegan Bettencourt, Lachlan Sellers, Josh Watts, Emilio Valencia, Presley Calisi, Sophia Farrington, Ava Posada, and Ashley Rollins.