

Two local theater productions halted by COVID-19 are well worth your time

Christine Carrillo's choreography steals the "Newsies Jr." show

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By Camille Bounds



Some of the teen cast of "Newsies Jr." perform on stage at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Photo courtesy South Valley Civic Theatre

The pandemic harnessed our local theater activity, leaving patrons hungry to get out and see the great shows here. Two South Valley shows getting ready for takeoff in 2020 were forced to wait two years. They both opened May 6 and play for three weekends – and they're worth the wait.

At the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, South Valley Civic Theatre opened the energetic "Newsies Jr.," directed by Colleen Blanchard, with 32 teens putting on a delightful musical show about the historic newsboy strike of 1899.

Christine Carrillo's choreography steals the "Newsies Jr." show and Larry Tom and his crew of set designers deliver a fascinating set for the show. SVCT's dedication to providing teens with an opportunity to appear in hit Broadway shows gives young people in the South Valley an opportunity to hone their song-and-dance skills. "Newsies" shows we are blessed with a lot of talented teens in the performing arts

Both shows carry super casts and are well worth watching. It's truly amazing that there is so much terrific talent in our area that can bring us quality theater productions.



South Valley Civic Theatre's 'Newsies Jr.' ready to hit the stage

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#) April 28, 2022

https://morganhilltimes.com/south-valley-civic-theatre-newsies-jr/?fbclid=IwAR2_CBgxfWOHdHnnRyGBssrQFrFzpC7EX-rJvOjjzNW3ZAeUaKZYQMtbRNE

At a very young age, Maya King was a very shy child, so her mother decided to have her audition for a role in a "Little Mermaid" production.

King, then 5, landed the role of Flounder, the friendly fish who is always willing to help those in need. Initially hesitant, King said she had the time of her life being on stage.

That first role kickstarted a career in theater for King, who is now 16 and attending Christopher High School, and has performed in more than 20 shows.

King is now playing as Spot Conlon in South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming teen show, "Newsies Jr.," who is the feared leader of the Brooklyn Newsies.

Conlon, typically performed as a boy in other productions of "Newsies Jr.," is a girl in SVCT's show, and King sees many similarities in personality between her and her character.

"I'm a very, very enthusiastic person," she said. "I'm very hyper. I honestly get stubborn sometimes, and that's a big part of the character. Stubborn is not always bad. It's a good thing to be able to stand up for yourself."

But there is one difficult thing about the character that King has realized during rehearsals.

"The only hard thing is owning the room," she said. "It's definitely hard to act like you have that confidence and act like you're very important."

"Newsies Jr.," directed by Colleen Blanchard, opens May 6 and runs Fridays through Sundays up until May 22 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road in Morgan Hill.

"Newsies Jr." is the teen version of the 2012 Disney Broadway musical, which is based on the 1992 film. Taking place during the Newsboy Strike of 1899, the musical follows Jack Kelly, who gathers his fellow newsboys together to take on Joseph Pulitzer, whose decision to raise the prices on newspapers impacted the youngsters who delivered them.

Producer Kathy Tom said SVCT's modular set allows pieces of it to change throughout the show, giving it the vibe of the Broadway show.

The cast of 32 features actors aged 12-19, most of which are from South County.



Riley Brown as Katherine, David Carlen (Jack) and Brody Bourke (Crutchie) are preparing for South Valley Civic Theatre's performance of "Newsies Jr.," which opens May 6. Photo: Travis Blanchard

"It's been a joy to work with them," Tom said. "They are all so eager and all so talented. It's such a good learning experience for the new kids."

Tom stressed the importance of the young actors being on stage, giving them the confidence and the public speaking skills they will use later in life. Such options were essentially nonexistent during the height of the pandemic, she noted.

"I see it as a step back into theater for these kids," she said. "So many of them haven't been able to do any theater at all. This is a chance for them to get back on stage and reintroduce themselves."

King said she's missed theater for the past two years, and added it's important for her peers to see the emotions they've felt over the last two years be played out on stage.

"'Newsies' is all about the camaraderie and rebellion of youth," she said. "This show is about fun, joy, danger and angst. It's all of these emotions you feel when you're growing up."

"Newsies Jr." opens May 6 and runs Fridays through Sundays up until May 22 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road in Morgan Hill. For tickets, visit svct.org/2022_newsies.

Main story: Extra! Extra! Teens perform in SVCT's 'Newsies' show

Actors glad to be back on stage after two-year hiatus

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By Marty Cheek

A small army of newspaper street vendors take on two of America's most powerful publishers in South Valley Civic Theatre's musical "Newsies JR."



Photo by Marty Cheek

The cast of South Valley Civic Theatre's teen production of the Disney musical "Newsies JR."

The show opens May 6 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. It is based on the historic Newsboy Strike of 1899, a story told in a 1998 Disney movie “Newsies” and later turned into a Broadway show.

In the show, newsboy Jack Kelly wants to leave New York City to be an artist. After “World” publisher Joseph Pulitzer raises newspaper prices at the newsboys’ expense to compete with William Randolph Hearst’s “Journal,” Kelly leads his fellow newsies to take action. With help from reporter Katherine Plumber, citizens recognize the power of “the little man.”

“They were caught in the crossfire,” said David Carlen, a 19-year-old Gavilan College student who plays Jack Kelly. “The newsies would have had to work a lot harder (to sell newspapers). They were not going to stand for that not just because it’s harder but because they felt so disrespected. They felt it was a violation of their rights as workers. And they felt like their pride was more important and were not going with what they were told to do.”



Brody Bourke plays “Crutchie,” Jack’s sidekick who suffers from polio and so has difficulty walking.

“They do everything together. Jack looks after Crutchie,” Bourke said. “Crutchie uses his crutch to basically guilt-trip people to buy his newspapers. That’s what the newsies did. They would always use different ways from injuries to age to sell more ‘papes’ to the people.”

The 15-year-old Gilroy High School freshman is impressed with his fellow performers’ talent in singing, dancing and acting to put on a high quality show.

Photo by Marty Cheek: Elijah Barnson (as “Race”) and Brody Bourke (as “Crutchie”) rehearse a scene for the South Valley Civic Theatre’s show “Newsies JR.” The show is based on the Broadway musical, which is based on the 1992 Disney film.

“We’re not doing the full show, we’re doing the junior show, which means it’s appropriate for kids,” he said. “It’s just a really cool show and I’ve liked it for a long time. I’m excited to be in it now.”

Maya King plays double roles, newsies Muriel and Spot Conlon. The 16-year-old Christopher High School junior wanted to do the show to give her an opportunity to sing and dance on stage.

“I love this show so much for its spirit and rebellion,” she said. “It’s been so long since we’ve been able to do live theater. We’ve all been coming back to it for the past few months. Just seeing SVCT back in action is going to be something really fun — to see the show and see the energy and joy and companionship. We’ve all just grown together.”

Lexie Mallette serves as the show’s production assistant, helping with costumes and assisting the performers in learning their lines and song lyrics.

“They’re super fun. They are very energetic,” she said of the teens. “They’re just a blast to be with. It’s a great cast, it’s a great group of kids, and they’re having a lot of fun and it’s great to see them.”

SVCT's dedication to providing children and teen shows play an important role in giving young people in the South Valley an opportunity to hone their performing arts talents, Mallette said.

"Newsies is a "perfect show for teens," she said. "You do the kiddie-like shows which are super fun . . . With the teen shows, there's this nice middle ground where you can do shows that you might not be able to do as a kid, but they're not quite adult shows."

The SVCT's cast is made up of 32 teenagers. At an hour and a half, "Newsies, Jr." is an abridged version of the full Broadway version, which is three hours long, said Kathy Tom, the show's producer. All the main elements of the original show are in the shortened version, which is written to be performed in schools and venues for young people.

For many of the cast, this is the first show they will perform in in more than two years because the pandemic prevented live theater performances, she said.

"These kids have been itching to get back on stage," Tom said. "We've got a lot of new faces, which I love. That's always exciting because that's your future of stage talent."

The newsies cast is made up of David Carlen, Joshua Barnson, Brody Bourke, Larissa Parson, Elijah Barnson, Maya King, Isabel Hanson, Jillian Puente, Makayla Hoiberg, Melanie Chipman, Makena Willis, Lucie Hall, Sydney Hoiberg, Sidney Berry, Lachlan Sellers, Chloe Grotz, Ishaan Joshi, Megan Kapusta, Alexander Bravo, Riley Brown, Fiona Hawk, Calista Roberts, Abigail Imerson, Joseph King, Molly Paul, Hayden Mallette, and Kyah Babayan.

Medda Larkin's Theater cast is made up of Ash Rollins, Ruby Salvatti, Ava Lowe, Gianna De Maria, and Megan Kapusta.

The citizens of New York cast is made up of Keegan Bettencourt, Lachlan Sellers, Gianna De Maria, Hayden Mallette, Ash Rollins, Chloe Groz, Ishaan Josh.

The producer is Kathy Tom, the director is Colleen Blanchard, the assistant director is Lexie Mallette, the vocal director is Alan Chipman, and the choreographer is Christine Carrillo