

# 'Proof' now playing on South Valley Civic Theater stage

First straight drama produced by local theater company

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*By Staff Report*



*Photo by Marty Cheek*

Doug Doughty as Robert and Angie Higgins as Catherine in the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama "Proof," now playing at the Community Playhouse.

After the death of her father, a brilliant mathematician, a young woman named Catherine must deal with mental and family issues as she discovers what direction she wants to go in her life. That's the premise of "Proof," the latest drama performed by the South Valley Civic Theatre which opened its new season Sept. 12.

"Catherine" is played by Angie Higgins, a San Jose resident who fell in love with the play when she first saw it. When a friend passed on the audition information to her for the show, she couldn't make the date but wrote the director Cindy Powell and asked for another day to audition. Her passion for the part got her the role in the four-character play written by David Auburn.

“When I first saw this show years ago, I really connected to it because I also lost my father,” Higgins said. “He was a teacher, so there’s a lot similarities with the story. Mind you, we weren’t math geniuses coming up with this monumental proof, but I definitely have connections to the relationships in my own life.”

The play contains heavy emotions that made the cast members cry during their first read-through. However, Auburn wrote in humorous touches to help cut the tension, Higgins said.

“I feel like everyone can connect to her in some way — feeling that hole left in your heart when they’re gone, wanting to imagine them there when they’re not — and also feeling being at sea with your life, not knowing in what direction to go in,” she said.

This is Higgins’s first show with SVCT. She has performed in other shows in Silicon Valley and is also the artistic director with the Shady Shakespeare Company based in Saratoga.

Joy Reynolds and Tracy van Gundy served as co-producers.

“It’s definitely a step away for South Valley Civic Theatre,” van Gundy said. “It’s our first straight drama that we’ve ever done.”

Besides Higgins, the other members of the cast include Doug Doughty who plays “Robert” (Catherine’s father), Andrew Cummings who plays “Hal” (a math protege of Robert), and Denee Lewis Bohnsack playing “Claire” (Catherine’s sister). Adrienne Wilkinson is an understudy and will play Claire during one of the final performances.

## **SOUTH VALLEY CIVIC THEATRE**

**What: “Proof”**

**When: 8 p.m. Sept. 19, 20, Oct. 3, 4, 10 and 11; 2:30 p.m. Sept. 21 and Oct. 5**

**Where: Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road**

**Tickets: [www.svct.org](http://www.svct.org)**

## Morgan Hill Times

September 18, 2014

by Camille Bounds

David Auburn's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning drama "Proof" has a mix of pathos, humor and wonder, which keeps the edginess of this show presented by South Valley Civic Theatre. Cindy Powell directs with a strong hand, involving the audience, which makes for an intimate experience.



*Photos by Laura Schraft  
Chief Photographer*



The story takes place in Chicago and centers around Catherine (Angie Higgins) who had taken on the responsibility of her once brilliant and renowned mathematician father (Doug Doughty), who has just died. She had cut herself off from friends and dedicated herself to taking care of him as he fell deeper into unreality and senility. We flash back and forth throughout the play to see what has brought her to this thin line nearing a breakdown, and the choices she must make for her future. Her controlling sister, Claire (Dence Lewis Bohnsack), arrives from New York and tries to push Catherine into decisions she does not want to make. Hal (Andrew Cummings), a former student of Catherine's father, adds to her confusion with his lack of trust.

Michelle Griffin's costumes are spot on while Andrew Cummings' set and Nate Cummings' lighting give the back porch set a realistic feel.

For an evening of well-done theater, this production of "Proof" is worth your attention and time.

# The Bigger Picture with Marty Cheek: ‘Proof’ proves SVCT is taking next step in theater quality

*Published in the Oct. 1-14, 2014 issue of Morgan Hill Life*

*By Marty Cheek*

The selection of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize-winning drama “Proof” to open the South Valley Civic Theatre’s 2014-2015 season was a risky choice but a smart one. David Auburn’s play is the first straight drama SVCT has ever performed, and it really shows how far our local theater company has evolved in 45 years.

I lived in London for several years when I worked for an international news service, and during that time I saw many stage performances in the city known as the theater capitol of the world. The acting range by the four SVCT actors — particularly Angie Higgins playing the central role of Catherine — at the Sept. 19 performance of “Proof” was just as impressive as what I saw in many plays I attended in London’s West End theater district.



Photo by Marty Cheek

Doug Doughty as Robert and Angie Higgins as Catherine in the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama “Proof,” now playing at the Community Playhouse.

In the play, Catherine must deal with her grief while preparing for the funeral of her mathematical genius father Robert (played by Doug Doughty), a professor at the University of Chicago. The young woman had

cared for her father through a lengthy mental illness, and must now find new purpose in life. Catherine also develops an antagonist relationship with Robert's ex-graduate student Hal (played by Andrew Cummings) who discovers a paradigm-shifting proof about prime numbers in Robert's office. Catherine's sister Claire (played by Denee Lewis Bohnsack) also adds to the balance in questions about women and academics as Catherine must prove to her she is capable of creating an idea that can rock the world of mathematics.

The high quality of Auburn's writing and the excellent SVCT performances might be reason enough to attend an upcoming performance of "Proof." But if you're open to drama that stimulates you both intellectually and emotionally, the play has much more to offer.

The play explores the impact that being a caregiver to a mentally or physically ailing parent can have on a daughter or son's life and relationship with other siblings. But the bigger question the play brings up — and it's especially relevant for the high-tech industry of the Silicon Valley region — is why women do not seem to gain a status in science and mathematical academics comparable with men.

In "Proof," the character Hal refers to a French noble woman named Marie-Sophie Germain who was born in 1776 and spent the time of the terrors of the French Revolution in the safety of her father's library studying mathematical volumes. Against her parents' oppositions and French society's shunning of women in academics, Germain became a pioneer of elasticity theory and won the grand prize from the Paris Academy of Sciences for her work on the subject. She also set a foundation for prime numbers study, which relates to the math proof in Auburn's play.

There have been other women who have contributed to the field of mathematical discovery. Ada Lovelace, the daughter of the poet Lord Byron, in 1842 wrote a computer program — even though these machines would not be invented until much later. Grace Hopper, an American scientist in the U.S. Navy, during World War II invented the first compiler for a computer programming language.

The play "Proof" is particularly topical because in August 28-year-old Stanford University mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani became the first woman to win the Field Medal, the most prestigious award in mathematics.

"Proof" might be a challenge for some theater goers who are not use to such a heavy-weighted and topical story, but it's well worth seeing before it ends its run Oct. 11. And if you have a daughter of high school age who shows interest in a possible career in math and science, I especially encourage you to share the enjoyment of SVCT's excellent stage drama with her.

**Paul Myrvold's Theatre Notes**  
<http://www.myrvoldstheatrenotes.com>

### **“Proof” at South Valley Civic Theatre**

Right off the top I want to commend SVCT for opening the 2014-2015 season with the Pulitzer Prize winning, Tony Award winning drama “Proof” by David Auburn. With its serious, non-linear plot and complicated emotional content is not an easy play, requiring much of both actors and audiences. On the night I saw the show in the later days of the run, the actors acquitted themselves well and the audiences clearly appreciated the effort.

Catherine (Angie Higgins), the twenty-five year old daughter of a renowned, just deceased mathematician at the University of Chicago, is a woman in emotional crisis. A gifted mathematician herself, she left the challenging math department at nearby Northwestern University to care for her father, Robert (Doug Dougherty) who developed an undefined mental disability that, save for a brief period of lucidity, rendered him incapable of the kind of mental challenges that higher mathematics require. Indeed, Catherine became trapped in her role as caretaker, the only other option being the unthinkable – institutionalization.

Dealing with the ghost of her father, the pressures of life, her own genius and fears that the mental illness might be hereditary, Catherine retreats into angst coming out only to deal with Hal (Andrew Cummings), one her father’s last students who has come to look over the many volumes of writings and equations left behind by Robert hoping to find hidden mathematical treasure, which he does. It is a proof that shifts the paradigm of prime numbers, but is it Robert’s or, as Catherine asserts, her own? Catherine’s situation is compounded when older sister Claire (Denee Lewis Bohnsack), a take charge type, comes home from New York to assist with the funeral and, fearing for her sister’s sanity, spirit her away to Manhattan to begin a new life that may include therapy.

As with all great plays, a bare bones synopsis doesn’t do justice to the details of the playing and the emotional impact of it all. “Proof” is proof that drama is first and foremost entertainment. It is fascinating and emotionally moving to witness characters in crisis, or peril, or danger. We identify with them, sometimes in a visceral way. Can anyone sit still in a seat and not twitch and move in sympathetic response when Rocky is duking it out with Clubber Lang?

The production looks good with a unit set representing the backyard deck of house in Chicago where all the action takes place. SVCT has ventured into the world of projections with a graphic of complex, higher mathematical equations covering the entire stage area before acts and between scenes. Scene changes, however take a little too long. It would be perfectly acceptable and entertaining to have a pair of efficient, black clad stagehands place and remove props in half-light, especially if there is underscoring. Carefully selected music, which is missing from this production, adds tremendously to the theatrical experience.

See “Proof” soon; the show closes October 11.



LORA SCHRAFT • CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER • MORGANHILLTIMES.COM

## SV Civic Theatre presents 'Proof'

*From left, Denee Lewis, as Claire, Angie Higgins, as Catherine, and Andrew Cummings, as Hal, perform during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of "Proof" at the Morgan Hill Playhouse Sept. 9. "Proof" opens tonight. For more information, visit [svct.org](http://svct.org).*