

# SVCT's 'Shrek the Musical' twists fairy tales into comical delight

Elaborate sets, costumes, dancer numbers make show a crowd pleaser

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*By Marty Cheek*



Andrew Stebbins , as "Shrek," and Emily Carillo, as "Donkey," discuss their problems during their fair tale adventure in SVCT's musical production of the classic story. Photo by Marty Cheek

An ogre with a cynical view of life, a princess with a dark secret, a donkey with a quick wit, and a fire-breathing dragon with a romantic streak. Those are just a few of the many delightful fairy tale characters who come to life on the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse stage during the current run of the South Valley Civic Theater's teenage show "Shrek, The Musical."

Based on the 2001 DreamWorks computer animated movie "Shrek," the Broadway musical version in 2008 became a hit show, running for more than a year. The fractured fairy tale, which tells the adventures of Princess Fiona and swamp ogre Shrek, gives the traditional story-land characters of childhood a whimsical twist

and adds adult-themed humor to the delight of both parents and children.

"It's a relationship story between two kinds of fairy tale creatures who have their stories go horribly wrong, but it all works out in the end," said co-producer Bruce Pember. "It takes very popular fairy tales and flips them on their head, and there's a larger fairy tale that's happening in the background between Fiona and Shrek. It's really a family play. Adults can get a lot out of it, too."

The other producers of "Shrek" are Marianne Snook and Tiffany Goller.

The SVCT choose to put "Shrek" into its 2014/2015 season because it's a fun story that's well known by people who have seen the movie but who might want to see an added dimension with new songs that were not in the animated version, Pember said.



Shrek and Fiona have a belching and flatulence contest as Donkey looks on with disgust. Photo by Marty Cheek

“The SVCT board tries to find and select plays that are relevant to the community, relevant to the actors and plays that can stimulate the kids and make them want to be involved,” he said. “Shrek is sort of a popular musical right now that is available for community theaters to license. The songs that are in the musical itself that weren’t in the movie kind of add to the movie that everyone grew up with.”

Pember has two daughters performing in the play. Brianna Pember plays “Fiona,” and Emily Pember plays “Young Fiona” and a “Blind Mouse.” The cast is made up of 35 performers made up of local youngsters from Morgan Hill, San Martin, Gilroy and San Jose.

Many of the performers required an elaborate costume to reflect the different fairy tale characters Shrek encounters during his adventures with Fiona.

“Our costume designer (Michelle Griffen) did just an amazing job with a very tight budget,” Pember said. “She’s the costumer that everyone tries to get for their plays here because she does such a fantastic job.”

One of the more creative costumes was made for the villainous comical character “Farquard,” played by Zack Goller. It required him to wear knee pads and walk around on his knees throughout the entire time he is on stage. Fake legs going down from his waist give the audience the illusion that he’s a dwarf, and Shrek and Donkey play off this state of stature with a comical game of punmanship.

“The funny thing is that Zack is a really tall individual, his whole family is tall, so it’s kind of funny that he plays this short, little dwarf,” Pember said. “The character is suppose to be the son of Grumpy, the dwarf in ‘Snow White.’”



Zack Goller as the egotistical villain “Farquard” sings about how wonderful he is. Photo by Marty Cheek



Shrek sings a ballad about what it’s like to be an unpopular ogre. Photo by Marty Cheek

The “Shrek” set designer is Andrew Cummings who also runs the drama guild at Live Oak High School and is involved in designing stage sets for play and musical productions around the Bay Area. The sets create the illusion of a dark forest, a dragon-guarded castle, and the palace of Farquard, who serves as the foil to Shrek. Cummings had originally designed a much more elaborate set, but budget constraints and volunteers’ time limits kept it from being created, Pember said.

“We couldn’t get even close to his overall vision because of the talent that would be required to put the sets together — we’re an all-volunteer theater, we don’t have that talent,” he said.

Showcasing Cummings' artistic talents for the stage is his design for a 24-foot dragon puppet that is 10 to 12 feet tall and moved around the stage by performers using PVC pipe to lift it up. It has moving wings, a moving mouth and eyes that light up.

Christine Carrillo choreographed the dance numbers in the musical, bringing together children who have previous experience dancing with first-timers, and teaching them how to work as a tap team in elaborate show-stopping numbers.

"She did an amazing job choreographing really complicated dances," Pember said. "She had the kids do a lot of dance numbers from the actual Broadway production, which is great because I didn't think at first the kids were capable of doing that."

Painted with a generous amount of green makeup, "Shrek" is played by Andrew Stebbins, a sophomore at Gilroy Early College Academy. In his portrayal of the ogre, Stebbins takes on a Scottish accent that is a close mimicry of the Michael Myers movie version. He said it's not hard to get into the character.



Shrek, Brianna Pember as the princess "Fiona" and a Three Blind Mice trio sing about their blossoming romance. Photo by

"I have an affinity for dialect, so if I want to do a Scottish accent, I really don't think about it and it comes out really naturally," he said. "This is my first ever leading role, and one that requires a lot of costuming. When I'm not focusing on the sweat coming down on my head, I really focus on the big hands and the big head mask thing and it makes me feel like Shrek."

Stebbins originally auditioned for the Farquar role, but was surprised when the producers offered him the starring role of Shrek. He learned the psychology of Shrek's character desiring to live by himself in his swamp home away from other people because the ogre was ill treated as a youngster by other children, Stebbins said.

"In his early childhood, he was not well liked because of his ugliness," he said. "He kind of learned to accept that. He's really cheerful about it and really happy where his life is in the swamp. And then Fiona comes in. He sees this girl come into his life and he says he doesn't want to get involved but wants to go back to his swamp and live in it. This is basically a fairy tale that destroys every other fairy tale."

As Fiona, Brianna Pember said she likes playing her character as a quirky and fun princess caught in a romantic story that is thrown off course by comical fate.

"She wants to have the perfect prince," the Live Oak freshman said. "She needs Shrek and eventually discovers he loves her for who she is and the two become more accepting of who each other really is."

In the second act, Brianna has to quickly undergo a costume change to turn into a female ogre. The timing is tricky, she said.

“I basically sit down and people are running around me putting makeup on my face,” she said. “The cast is so much fun. Everyone is so talented. I’ve never been in a production where everyone can sing and everyone can dance so well.”

Producer Pember is proud of the quality of the production and believes it’s one of SVCT’s best musical shows involving so many complex elements. A wide variety of talents — including parents’ involvement — have come together to create a fun show for South Valley residents.

“With some of the kids in ‘Shrek,’ we’re seeing the best work they’ve ever done,” he said. “And then we got some newer kids to our theater who have done theater elsewhere and they’re involved because this is such a popular play ... It’s community theater so there are a lot of families involved in the production.”

### **SHREK ON STAGE**

**Show times: Friday Feb. 27, March 6, 13 at 8 p.m.; Saturday Feb. 28, March 7, 14 at 8 p.m.; and Sunday March 1, 8 at 2:30 p.m.**

**Location: Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road**

Morgan Hill Times

## **‘Shrek The Musical’: An escape to fantasy**

Posted: Friday, February 27, 2015 9:12 am

by Camille Bounds

What do you get when you stir up a burping ogre with a flatulence problem, a cheeky donkey, a sassy cookie, a delightful heroine, an optimistic Pinocchio, an egocentric villain you love to hate and just about all the fairy tale characters you can get under one roof? You get “Shrek the Musical.”

Put a bunch of talented kids together with the South Valley Civic Theatre and you get a well-done teen version.

The crazy, charming musical comes from the creative magic of Dreamworks, which brought us “Shrek,” the Oscar-winning animated movie about an ogre that finds a love to fight for and where good triumphs over evil.

The musical has the book and lyrics by Pulitzer Prize winner David Lindsay-Abaire and music by Jeanine Tesori. The plot runs about the same as the movie and opened to rave reviews on Broadway in December 2009, earning eight Tony Award nominations.

The ingenious original choreography by Christine Carrillo is a joyful jolt to the eye of fast fun and movement. Imaginative costumes by Michelle Griffin and her team are a glorious treat to the senses of color and design.

A top-flight, energetic teen cast carries the production under the direction of Janell Cummings and Ken Powell. Andrew Stebbins makes a believable, lovable Shrek. Zack Goller as Farquaad is a delight as the villain you love to hate and Brianna Pember brings us a gutsy Fiona. Creative sets and a huge dragon by Andrew Cummings and his team keep our attention throughout the show.

Bring the whole family for a fun filled evening or afternoon of joyful shenanigans and music that leaves all with a great feeling of well being and delight. Who can’t use a shot of well-being and delight? I know I can.

# SVCT's Shrek the Musical

Lora Schraft/Chief Photographer | Posted: Wednesday, February 18, 2015 8:15 am



Brianna Pember, playing the role of Fiona, performs with members of the cast during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Emily Carillo, playing the role of Donkey, performs with the dragon, assisted by Shelby Shutt, during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Shelby Shutt leads the dragon during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Brianna Pember, playing the role of Fiona, performs with members of the cast during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Emily Carillo, playig the role of Donkey, Brianna Pember, playing the role of Fiona, and Andrew Stebbins, playing the role of Shrek, perform during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Emily Carillo, playig the role of Donkey, Andrew Stebbins, playing the role of Shrek, Brianna Pember, playing the role of Fiona, and the three blind mice, played by Emily Pember, Sierra Benitez, Mia Veltri, perform during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



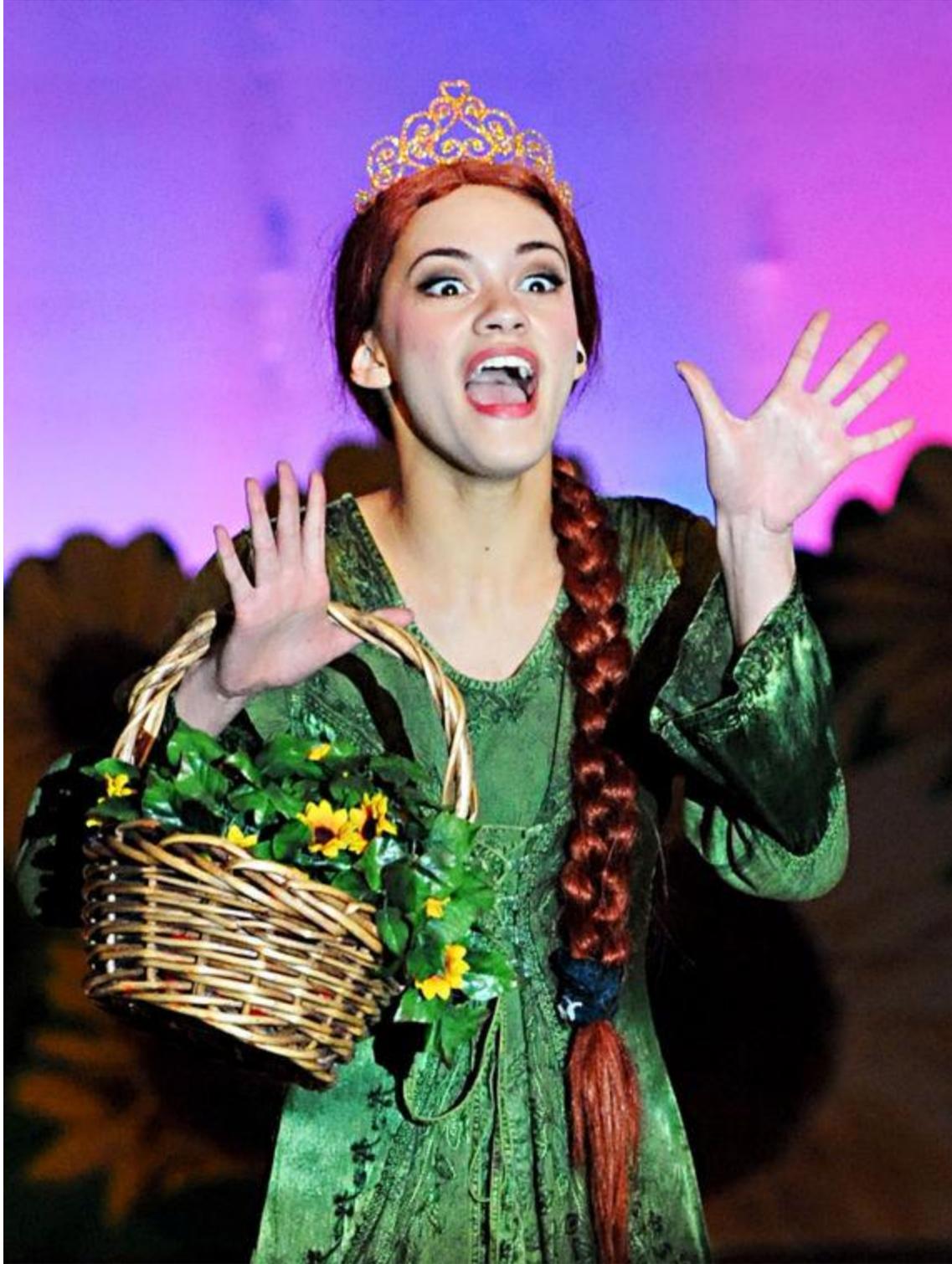
Zach Goller, playing the role of Farquard, performs during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17



Zach Goller, playing the role of Farquaad, performs during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of *Shrek the Musical* at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Andrew Stebbins, playing the role of Shrek, performs during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.



Brianna Pember, playing the role of Fiona, performs during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Shrek the Musical at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb 17.

# Musical Misfits

LOCAL THEATER



**DONKEY AND DRAGON** Emily Carillo, as Donkey, performs with the dragon, assisted by Shelby Stutt, during a dress rehearsal for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of "Shrek the Musical" at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse Feb. 17.

## SVCT'S LATEST PRODUCTION OPENS TONIGHT

STAFF

**I**n a faraway kingdom, an unseemly ogre shows up to rescue a feisty princess. A band of misfits—including a chatty donkey, a villain with a

short temper and a cookie with an attitude—join in and create South Valley Civic Theatre's "Shrek the Musical."

Based on the Dreamworks film by the same name, the production is a musical about everyone's favorite ogre, with a cast that includes Andrew Stebbins as Shrek, Brianna Pennix as Princess Fiona, Zach Gilman as Puss in Boots and Emily Carillo as Donkey.

SVCT presents "Shrek The Musical" at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays beginning tonight through March 14, with 2:30 p.m. matinees March 1 and 8 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road, Morgan Hill.

South Valley Civic Theatre (initially Gilroy Community Theatre) has presented live theater for 46 years. Each annual season features five productions,

typically including a large musical with an all-age cast, a smaller musical, a teen musical, a children's musical and a non-musical comedy or drama. It is a nonprofit organization directed and staffed entirely by volunteers.

For information about "Shrek," visit [svct.org](http://svct.org) and read columnist Camille Bourde's review on *Lifestyles page B6*.

# 'Shrek The Musical': An escape to fantasy

Gilroy Dispatch

By: Camille Bounds

February 27, 2015

<https://gilroydispatch.com/shrek-the-musical-an-escape-to-fantasy/>

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Through: March 14

Tickets: General \$22, student \$15, senior \$18

Reservations and information: (408) 842-SHOW or visit SVCT.org.