

SVCT producing Ellie Greenwich's life story in 'Leader of the Pack' musical

A noon Feb. 27 showing for those with special needs

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By Staff Report



Photo by Marty Cheek

The cast of "Leader of the Pack," produced by South Valley Civic Theater, rehearses for their upcoming shows.

Known for such doo-wop hits as "Da Doo Ron Ron" and "Chapel of Love," songwriter-singer Ellie Greenwich's life story comes to the Morgan Hill Playhouse stage as South Valley Civic Theatre puts on "Leader of the Pack" teen musical.

Becca Reynolds, 15, performs the lead part of Greenwich. The sophomore at Live Oak High School watched a few videos to understand the character and her times.

"She was a singer-songwriter in the '60s and the '70s. This show is pretty much about her life and it incorporates all these songs that were popular during those days," she said. "I looked at the script and kind of embraced how she was. She's very bubbly, I guess, like very happy. But when she wants to get angry she can get angry."

At the beginning of the show, Greenwich, meets a man named Jeff Barry and they get married and begin a songwriting team. The marriage doesn't last and they get a divorce, "and that like sets her off and she feels she's going to go crazy," Reynolds said. "But at the end, she realizes

she has her music and everything is going to be fine. She pretty much chooses her music over him.”

Marianne Snook described the musical as a history of all the songs Greenwich wrote.

“She’s one of the first female song writers who ever got taken seriously,” she said. “The show is basically singing and dancing for two hours – ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s music and all of her songs.”

Among the songs that are performed are “Do Wah Diddy,” “Not to Young to Get Married,” “Baby I Love You,” “Look of Love,” “River Deep, Mountain High,” and the title song “Leader of the Pack.”

“Some of the songs came to be because of that part of her life she was going through,” Snook said. “There’s so much great music and it gives the kids a chance to sing and dance. And it tells the story of this powerful woman who people didn’t know even existed even though she’s part of the music background.”

The producers decided to go “over-the-top” in creating the set and costumes with lots glitter, big hair, blingy clothes to give a sense of the ’60s, she said. The cast has 37 performers including two special needs children with autism who will perform in the “Christmas” song number. The Feb. 27 noon performance will be a show for children with special needs.

Chris Goller, who played in several SVCT shows including “The Producers,” is directing the show.

“He’s really, really good with kids and wanted them to have a great time and have a good show, too,” Snook said. “I think the audience will sing along with songs they know but didn’t know who wrote them.”

Goller sees the show as a great date-night performance that will have the audience leaving the theater humming Greenwich’s tunes and feeling happy.

“Even though the kids didn’t know the music, that whole doo-wop era had a lot of timeless songs to it,” he said. “So once they started listening to the music, they really took a shine to it more than I thought they would. So it made the show more fun and more energetic and created more enthusiasm in it.”