

Theater arts: SVCT brings the always fun musical ‘Mary Poppins’ to the stage

Based on the movie, the Broadway music was updated with some new songs

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. Actors perform the song “Jolly Holiday” at the June 2 rehearsal for upcoming shows of “Mary Poppins” which opened June 3



Zack Goller as Bert and Heidi Oliphant as Mary Poppins rehearse a scene for performances of “Mary Poppins” produced by South Valley Civic Theatre.

The supercalifragilisticexpialidocious musical version of “Mary Poppins” is giving South Valley Civic Theatre audiences a jolly holiday. The world’s most famous British nanny comes flying into performances at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse throughout the month of June.

Based on the Walt Disney film starring Julie Andrews but updated with new songs to accompany the beloved tunes from the movie, this Broadway musical gives a twist to the story by having Poppins show the Banks family how to let go of their dysfunctions and honor each other as individuals.

Heidi Oliphant plays the starring role of Mary Poppins and said she took on a slightly different style of performing the iconic part compared to the actress Andrews. Oliphant is a lot stricter in dealing with the bratty Banks children, Jane and Michael, she said.

“The key for to playing Mary Poppins is the poise and the character, the very practically perfect yet stern at the same time,” she said. “Probably my Mary Poppins is a little bit more stern and she whips them into shape when they’re not treating their toys very nicely. She also has that very tender side just like Julie Andrews.”

The performers have been rehearsing for the past three months and during that time Oliphant has developed a close friendship with many of the 42 cast members, especially the young ones. The age range goes from nine to 70 years.

“It’s a very happy cast. I love them,” she said. “And with the kids in the cast, I’ve ended up like their nanny. We’ve bonded and played games and stuff.”

Zack Goller plays the London cockney chimney-sweep “Bert” who helps Mary Poppins in her job of straightening out the Banks family. His role involves much singing, dancing and comedy — with several fast costume changes between scenes. He has been doing shows with SVCT for six years and this is the most challenging in terms of the dance numbers.

“The cockney accent is actually a lot easier to pull off than I thought it would be,” he said. “I thought it would be my biggest challenge.”



Zack Goller as Bert.

The show is fun for parents as well as kids, he said. “It’s going to be a great family show, for sure,” he said. “There’s a whole bunch of magical scenes — I don’t want to tell about them because it’ll ruin the surprise. There’s also the songs from the movie everyone loves as well as new songs.”

Co-producers of the show are Marianne Snook and Tiffany Goller who have previously worked together producing “Shrek the Musical” and “Leader of the Pack.” The “Mary Poppins” musical is the most technically challenging of the three shows they have co-produced because the set uses a rear-projection screen to create the

illusion of London locations such as St. Paul’s Cathedral and a British bank. SVCT also paid \$8,000 to hire a company to set up a flying rig bolted to the theater’s ceiling to allow actors to soar across London skies or climb up the side of walls in dance numbers.



The coldness of George and Winifred Banks’ marriage and the father’s emotional distance from his children are spotlighted in the musical version of the story, connecting more with the darker vision of the P. L. Travers book the movie was based on.

“Mary Poppins is there, of course, but the story is really about the Banks family and their transition from a dysfunctional family to coming together,” Snook said.

There are also some additional plot twists to the musical version of the story that the movie did not have.

“We have a scene where the toys are just really fed up with the children not treating them well and they come to life to teach them a lesson about how to be loving and to take care of them,” Snook said. “It’s really about how the book was written. It’s sort of a darker version, but that being said, (director) Megan Griffin’s vision was to make it a bit ‘campy.’ She wanted it a bit

dark but she also wanted it to feel light and silly and everyone could be drawn into the fun parts, too. She wants every character to have a special feeling to them.”



This is Griffin’s first time directing a play and, at age 23, she found that it is a challenging one with all the musical numbers, costume and sets and the flying rig.

“It’s been a lot of learning in this experience,” she said about directing “Mary Poppins” for SVCT. “Not everything went perfectly, but I think it’s going to be a really strong show and I’ve very happy at how it’s turning out so far.” The experience has also been a family affair. Griffin’s mother Michelle Griffin did most of the costumes for the show. Other staff members

include Joy Reynolds as assistant director, Alan Chipman as music director, Lynette Oliphant as vocal director, Jyovonne Montosa as choreographer, and Kathy Tom as the flight director. A special show noon Saturday June 11 will be performed for children with special needs such as autism where parents can bring them to the play and not worry about them making sounds or standing up in the middle of the performance.

“It’s also a regular show, so as long as people are OK with it, there might possibly be distractions from the audience,” Griffin said.

'Mary Poppins' lands in Morgan Hill

Gilroy Dispatch

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Camille Bounds



Zack Goller and Heidi Oliphant lead the cast in South Valley Civic Theatre's production of 'Mary Poppins' at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Performances run through June 25.

Photo: Elizabeth Mandel

She flies, she sings and she dances—that's what Heidi Oliphant does in this South Valley Civic Theatre production of Mary Poppins. Along with Zack Goller, who joins her as Bert the Chimney Sweep, and Elizabeth Calisi, who adds to the fun as the long-suffering Mrs. Banks, the three leads keep a lively crew of more than 40 kids aged nine to 70 moving in the right direction. Award-winning producer Cameron Mackintosh of Les Miserables, Cats, and The Phantom of the Opera fame, successfully transformed Mary Poppins into a long running, mega-award-winning production. Nine of the original 13 songs are in the stage version, with songwriters George Stiles and Anthony Drewe adding several new delightful numbers to supplement the original score.

SVCT brought in flying effects by 2FX. Inc at a cost of \$8,000 and added a rear projection screen effect to provide scenes of London.

Mary Poppins was written by P.L.Travers, a native Australian who spent most of her life in England. Walt Disney made an entrancing movie of her story with Julian Fellowes adapting the story for the stage and the award-winning Sherman Brothers supplying lyrics and music. Their delightful songs fascinated and gave the world a charming gift.

Once heard, their songs seem unforgettable. Long after you have left the theatre you find yourself humming their music. "Chim Chim Cher-ee," "Supercalifraglistcexpialidocious," (sung forward and backwards,) "A Spoonful of Sugar" and "A Step In Time" are just a few of the charming songs with added bouncy choreography. Of course Mary Poppins flies in and out of scenes with her umbrella held high, amid sets by director Megan Griffin with colorful costumes by Michelle Griffin. The energetic cast keeps this show moving at an pleasing pace.

Mary Poppins is the story of an efficient, over-the-top nanny with magical powers who travels with the winds by umbrella. She lands into the 1940 London home of the Banks who are in need of a nanny for their two bratty, parent-neglected children, whose main aim in life is to see how fast they can get rid of any nanny hired. Mary Poppins comes on the scene just in time to straighten all the problems out while singing and dancing with her friend, Bert the Chimney-Sweep, who charms everyone he sees. Sounds silly, perhaps, but it delivers an evening of fun and pleasure for adults and kids alike.

Mary Poppins is Supercalifraglistcexpialidocious.