

## SVCT's 'Moana JR' performances will delight both young and old

A talented cast carries the performance with their strong personalities.

<https://morganhilllife.com/2023/09/25/review-moana-jr/>

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By Camille Bounds

South Valley Civic Theatre's children shows are always a grand surprise. And when director Jenn Oliphant leads a production, audiences enjoy a creative musical experience that goes beyond the ordinary. There always seems to be a part of her presence that makes the audience a part of the show as it unfolds. That is a true gift.

“Moana JR” is a delightful 75-minute adaption of the 2016 Disney animated movie. It offers fresh music, characters, and a few fun changes in the storyline compared to the original film.

Delphine Sen, 13, leads the cast as “Moana,” a young Polynesian woman with an adventurous soul who feels restless among her insular island village community. Her energetic personality endears the audience to her as she goes through her adventures, making getting through the journey delightful fun.

The challenges begin when Moana, in defiance of her family’s wishes, casts off on a quest to restore the stolen heart of an ancient spirit in order to save her village from blight and famine. Along her way she encounters “Maui,” a boisterous demigod with a personality leagues different from what Moana is used to.

Adam Hart, 12, plays the shape-shifting trickster with a comic flair. Together, the two unlikely companions brave mythic dangers in order to right the wrongs of the past and save the world.

A talented cast carries the performance with their strong personalities. Their enthusiasm is truly enjoyed. Seven-year-old Sienna Avila and 8-year-old Savannah Torres especially deliver their roles as Moana’s friends with super energy and vigor.

The SVCT production’s Natalie Fitzgibbons provides choreography for this fast-moving production. Special effects keep adults and kids in awe.

The real heroes of this production are the technical people and parents backstage. Can you imagine what to do with 64 kids from 6 to 14 waiting for their cue in a small backstage area? Malisha Kumar is the assistant director, Clara Shem Tov and Spencer Oliphant lighting, with Brian Bourke on sound — all do their jobs well. Lorraine Bell, Megan Christian and Katy Torres create costumes of high Broadway caliber.

For an enchanting afternoon or evening, this children show will take you on a fun musical adventure.

## Young cast prepares for ‘Moana Jr.’ in Morgan Hill

South Valley Civic Theatre opens new season Sept. 22

<https://gilroydispatch.com/young-cast-prepares-moana/>



Delphine Sen (center), who performs as Moana, is joined by Savanna Torres (left) and Sienna Avila for South Valley Civic Theatre’s “Moana Jr.” Photo: Jenn Oliphant

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#)

September 14, 2023

South Valley Civic Theatre is kicking off its new season with “Moana Jr.,” a coming-of-age story featuring an all-youth cast that discovers the value of family and friendships.

Disney's "Moana Jr." follows Moana, a teenage girl who sets sail across the Pacific Ocean to save her village while learning about her heritage.

The show opens Sept. 22 and runs through Oct. 7 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

Director Jenn Oliphant said the cast of 64 range in age from 6 to 13 years old.

"We have 64 little stars and no shortage of energy," she said. "Everybody has a chance to shine and everybody is on stage and gets to be heard."

Oliphant said "Moana Jr." has a strong message for children, one that teaches them the importance of family and also how to grow up into the person they want to be.

"It's such an empowering thing for kids," she said. "We branch out and learn our own skills."

Oliphant, a longtime crew member of South Valley Civic Theatre, said by not having cast fees, the theater group opens its doors for young actors to experience the stage.

"We open that opportunity to everyone," she said. "Everyone belongs. Everyone has a place and a chance to be seen and heard."

Michael Horta, who is producing the show with Ken Christopher, said many performers in the show are not only new to South Valley Civic Theatre, but also to the stage.

"We're excited to bring this children's show to the stage," he said. "Everyone is very excited to be in this production."

Delphine Sen, 12, who plays Moana, said this is her first time in a leading role.

"There's a lot of responsibility in the main role," she said. "You have to set an example. It's really fun once you get the hang of it."

Adam Hart, 11, plays Maui, a character described as boisterous and obnoxious who befriends Moana and learns the value of humility and kindness.

Being one of the older cast members in the show comes with its own set of responsibilities, he noted, as he serves as a role model for the younger children and teaches them to follow directions.

"This show is very fun," Adam said. "It's not the same old 'Moana' you see everyday on Disney+. It's a whole different story line with new things, new songs and a whole lot of fun stuff."

Oliphant praised the cast members' parents for the time they've spent helping with the show, from building and painting sets to dropping off their children at rehearsals.

"This has become a fabulous community where kids and adults can find friendship and belonging," she said.

"Moana Jr." runs Sept. 22 through Oct. 7 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. Showtimes are 7pm on Fridays and Saturdays, with 2pm times on Saturdays and Sundays. For information and tickets, visit [svct.org/2023\\_moana](http://svct.org/2023_moana).



## **‘Moana Jr.’ will take audiences on a fun, energetic adventure**

**64 talented youngsters ages 6 to 13 are in the cast**

<https://morganhilllife.com/2023/09/11/svct-moana/>



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By Calvin Nuttall

South Valley families, get ready to embark on an enchanting voyage of self-discovery as “Moana Jr.” sets sail for 10 shows.

South Valley Civic Theatre showcases a vibrant cast of 64 talented youngsters ages 6-13. This 75-minute musical adaptation of Disney’s 2016 animated film offers fresh music, characters, and changes in the storyline compared to the movie. The show opens Friday, Sept. 22 and runs three weekends.

Delphine Sen, 13, leads the cast as “Moana,” a young Polynesian woman with an adventurous soul who feels restless among her insular island village community.

“Moana loves her family, but she just wants to go out into the ocean and see what is out there, and her parents won’t let her,” Sen said.

The adventure begins when Moana, in defiance of her family’s wishes, casts off on a quest to restore the stolen heart of an ancient spirit in order to save her village from blight and famine. Along her journey she encounters “Maui,” a boisterous demigod with a personality leagues different from what Moana is accustomed to.

“She has never met someone quite like him,” Sen said. “He is free-spirited and adventurous. When she goes on this adventure, at first I think she is scared, but then she grows more confident when she meets Maui. He encourages her to let her true self shine through. She discovers her confidence.”

Adam Hart, 12, plays the shape-shifting trickster Maui. Together, the two unlikely companions brave mythic dangers in order to right the wrongs of the past and save the world.

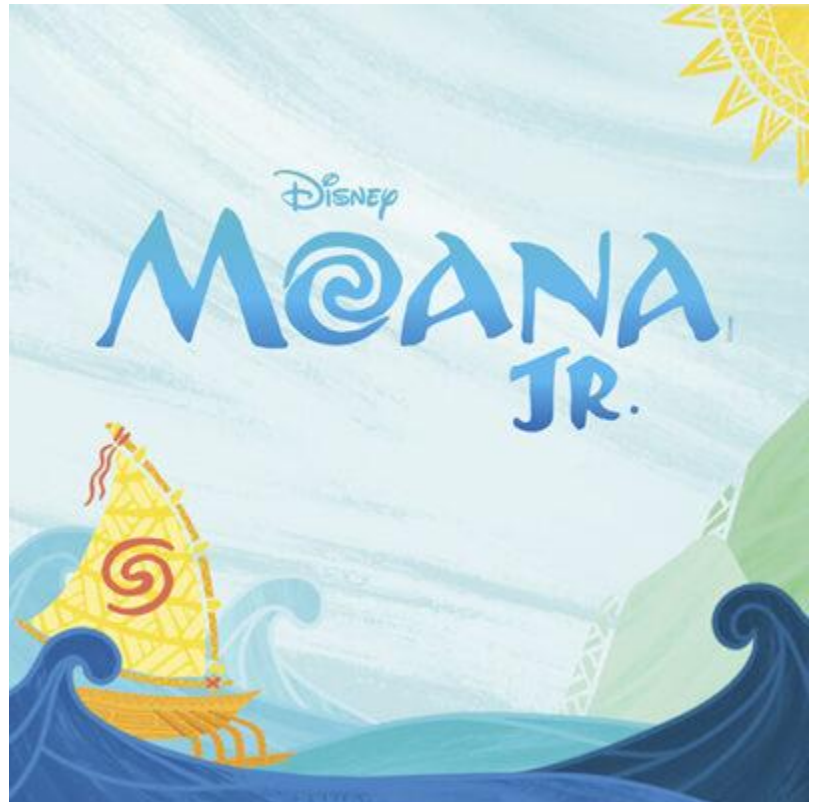
“It’s very fun,” he said. “Maui always loves to joke around, and he is adventurous. He loves to go out into the wild. In the beginning, he thinks Moana is just a fan of his, like everybody else who knows him. But the more you get into the show, the more they become real friends.”

Supporting Moana and Maui is a cast of characters, many of whom are specially written for the stage adaptation.

“One of the great things about the musical is that, in addition to these two main characters, there are a lot of outstanding featured parts,” said co-producer Ken Christopher. “A lot of kids get the chance to shine.”

While working with so many performers presents challenges, the kids take it in stride.

“It’s really fun working with such a big cast,” Sen said. “No matter what rehearsal you go to, you’ll always have a friend. Everyone in the cast is so sweet and talented, and I’m really grateful to work with everybody.”



Shepherding the actors required a coordinated effort between the crew and the parents of the cast, who have been heavily involved in the production. Director Jenn Oliphant is well qualified to lead such an effort. A mother of six, she is no stranger to the task.

“It’s a lot of energy, but I have never minded that,” Oliphant said. “I have learned that with a lot of energy you just channel that into something that is productive. Acting is a really good outlet for really big feelings. Singing and dancing are great at helping kids to feel good moving in their own bodies and using their own voices.”

The cast size is a testament to the success of SVCT's children's show program, which aims to engage new families in the performing arts. The "Moana" cast is larger than recent children's shows, Christopher said, which had been slow to recover their numbers after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We wanted to make sure we really got a fire going under the kids' program," he said. "We knew a Disney show was going to be a sure-fire thing to get kids and the community excited. With getting more than 64 kids cast, more than quadruple the previous kids' show, we feel like we completed our mission."

Michael Horta co-produces the show. He has a passion for working with children and loves finding ways to help them express themselves creatively and cultivate their talents.

"We knew 'Moana' would bring in kids," he said. "I think it helps they know the show, and they are excited to see the new songs and other things that aren't in the movie. I'm hopeful most if not all of those families will come back for the kids' show next year, or move on to the teen show."

The set will be as vibrant as the cast, with a Polynesian-influenced artistic theme. The art is inspired by the work of husband-and-wife duo Matthew and Roxanne Ortiz, aka "Wooden Wave." Their murals can be found in Hawaii and across the U.S., Oliphant said.

"My other love, besides working with kids, is set design," she said. "We have these incredible murals you'll see inspired by Wooden Wave. It's very colorful and appealing to kids. This is a kid's show by kids and for kids, so it has a lot of colors and shapes."

While "Moana, Jr.," is a fun and energetic adventure for audiences of all ages, the production's importance goes beyond its face value, Oliphant said. By enabling young people to get involved in the creative process, projects like this encourage the development of essential skills and generate positive mental health outcomes.

"When you are paying to go see a kids' show, it's not just about the entertainment factor," she said. "When you come to a kids' show, you are investing in a future where children have grown into adults who know how to interact with the world and everyone around them. These kids are learning empathy, because they are having to step into other characters' shoes. They're learning how to express themselves, and they're learning self-discipline."