

Lightning Thief

Show led by Brody Bourke as “Percy Jackson”



Published in the February 21-March 5, 2024 issue of Morgan Hill Life

By Calvin Nuttall

Greek gods, mythic monsters, and teen angst storm the stage in South Valley Civic Theatre’s production of “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical.” The show opens Feb. 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

In this musical adaptation of the popular 2005 young adult novel by Rick Riordan, 12-year-old “Percy Jackson’s” life is upended when he discovers he is the demigod son of Poseidon, god of the sea. With this revelation, the dorky middle -schooler is suddenly hurled onto an adventure filled with mythological beasts, teen drama, and a ticking clock to stop a war between the gods.

“It’s funny, it’s quirky, it is a very dramatic version of the book,” said producer Jenn Oliphant. “It moves the plot along really quick, and there are brief cameos from the book’s favorite villains and side characters. And what’s not to love about adding music and dancing?”

The show is led by Brody Bourke as “Percy Jackson,” supported by Riley Brown as “Annabeth,” the demigoddess daughter of Athena and (at first) his rival and reluctant ally; and Joey King as “Grover,” their

mutual friend and guardian, who happens to be a half-goat satyr. They lead the entire cast of more than 20 young talented performers to bring the epic odyssey to life.

“Brody is one of the loveliest, most inclusive and personable kids that you’re ever going to meet,” Oliphant said. “Within a week or so we realized that, not only was he the perfect Percy Jackson, he was also the perfect lead because he really just brings everyone in the cast together. Brody has set a precedent of being wonderful to each other.”

The show not only includes teens in the cast, but also its band, which is half composed of adolescents. Several youths take key roles among the crew as well, including assistant producer Clara Shem-Tov, director Ian Lasky, and assistant director Bella Tankersley. They are assisted by Oliphant and mentor director Max Tarlton.

“They are taking it very seriously,” Oliphant said. “Clara is learning what it is like to be a producer, and learning scheduling, budgeting, publicity, marketing, advertising, all of the things that go with being a producer. She is incredibly talented. Our entire tech crew is made up of teens, our front-of-house manager is a teen as well. This is a really unique production.”

Percy begins the show as a seemingly normal middle schooler living in New York City, wondering about his place in the world.

Although he loves his mom, “Sally Jackson,” his home life is unstable and his relationship with his stepfather is contentious. He takes solace in his mother’s stories about Greek myths that she knows unusually well.

The young hero’s call to adventure begins when Percy’s math teacher suddenly transforms into a monster and assaults him.

That is when his best friend Grover is forced to reveal that he is a mythical creature as well, and intercedes to help him. In the resulting action, his mother is killed, and Percy is whisked away to a place called “Camp Half-Blood,” the only safe place for demigods.

“Grover is a protector, first and foremost,” Joey King said. “He is a little bit of comic relief, very nervous about keeping his friends safe and making sure they don’t get into danger.”

Despite being a mythical creature, Grover is as much a normal, relatable teen character as Percy, King said.

“I feel Grover is just very much like me, but more dramatized,” he said. “The way he acts around his friends and even his insecurities are like mine. That blends with me and helps me portray him better, more easily. I know what he’s going through, in some ways. Minus the mystical stuff.”

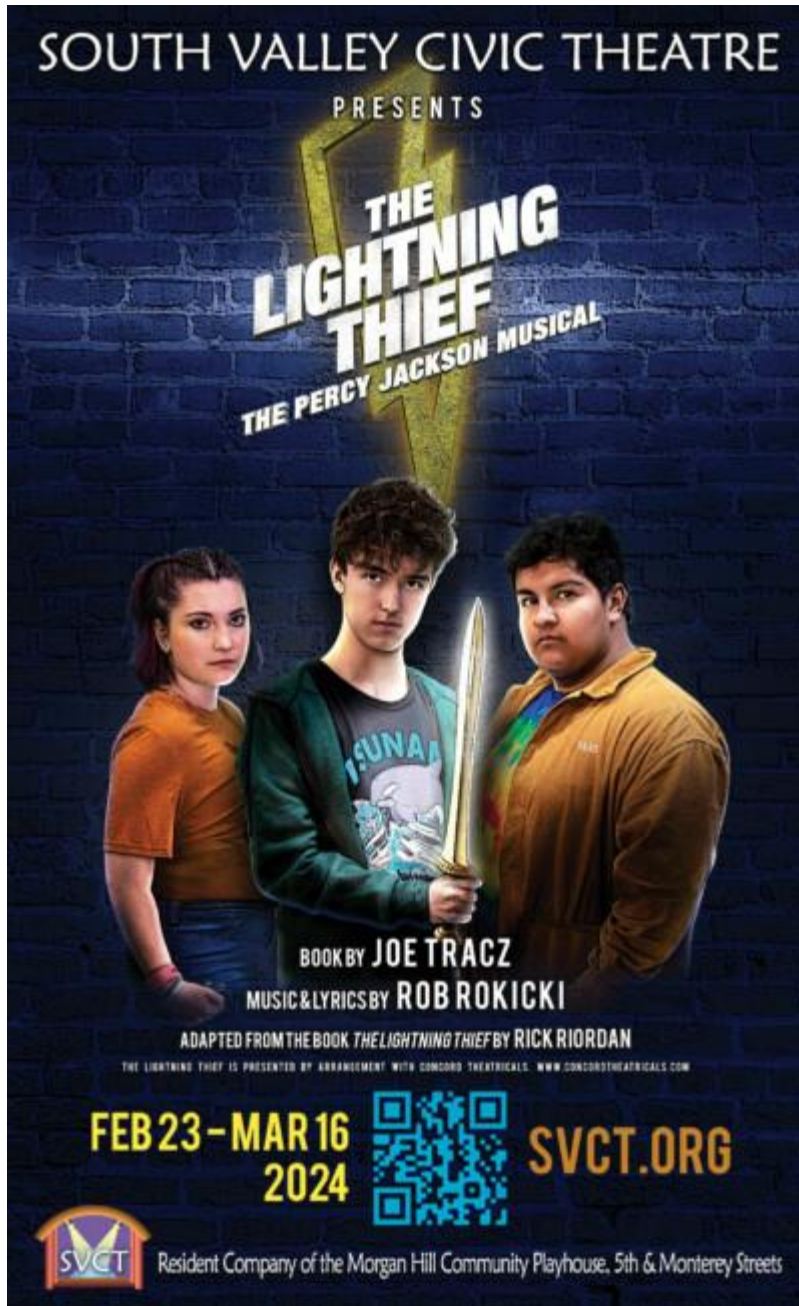
At Camp Half-Blood, Percy meets other children of the gods, including Annabeth. The trio then embark on an important quest: to retrieve the stolen lightning bolt of Zeus from Hades, in the Underworld.

“The whole reason he decides to go on the quest is to save his mom from the Underworld,” Bourke said. “He has no intention to return the lightning bolt, he doesn’t care about that. The main reason he is on this quest is to save her.”

The fate of the world hinges on the young man’s mission. If he does not return the stolen lightning bolt before the summer solstice, it will spark a war between Zeus and Poseidon, as these gods are not allowed to have children and Percy is the primary suspect.

“Eventually, he comes to realize the importance of his quest,” Bourke said. “He starts to learn more about who he is and how important this really is to him. He starts growing stronger and caring more about everything that is happening in the world.”

Annabeth decides to accompany Percy in order to prove herself to her mother, Athena, who is a rival of Poseidon. Consequently, she does not trust Percy to get the job done. While at first cold and standoffish, the two eventually warm to one another.



“She is covering up her feelings by being the tough girl and showing off,” Brown said. “She tries to be the best because she is hoping that, if she is good enough one day, Athena will want to come meet her. She is trying to find her place, hoping that one day someone will love her, and some day that she’ll be enough.”

The emotional turmoil within the main characters comes to the forefront in the show’s music, Oliphant said.

“With the music, you really get a feel for what some of these kids are going through,” she said. “When you read the books, you kind of understand the personalities and some of the motivations that exist behind the characters, but when you hear the music, they speak straight from the heart.”

Annabeth’s role is particularly musically challenging, Brown said, but worth the effort. She likened the music to a Greek chorus in its ethereal beauty.

“She is so complex and deep,” she said. “Some of her solos are so musically complicated that, when I told people I got this part, people were congratulating me for landing it primarily because of the difficulty of the songs she sings. She is crazy over-the-top, and I don’t get a lot of opportunities to showcase that kind of range.”

Bringing magical creatures to life on such a big production has been its own unique challenge,

Oliphant said. To tackle it, the crew has tasked Jason Leong with creating the show’s graphic design and practical effects.

“Jason does really amazing puppeteering work, so we have brought him in to design an eight-foot Minotaur, among other things,” she said. “This is where you get to use everyone’s creativity.”

MORGAN HILL THE TIMES

\$1 • Friday, February 16, 2024 • Vol. 130, No. 7 • morganhilltimes.com • Serving Morgan Hill since 1894



TEEN CAST Pictured are cast members in the upcoming production of “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical”: Riley Brown as Annabeth, Brody Bourke as Percy Jackson and Joey King as Grover.

Showtime

UPCOMING 'PERCY JACKSON MUSICAL' FEATURES YOUTH CAST AND CREW

STAFF REPORT

South Valley Civic Theatre's next production, "The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical," features an all-youth cast and crew of teens from throughout South County, under the mentorship of producers Jenn Oliphant and Malisha Kumar.

The show is based on the popular Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan—specifically his book "The Lightning Thief," which was adapted into a musical in 2017. Jackson, a 12-year-old adventurer, finds out he is the son of a Greek god and is introduced to a world that has previously been hidden from him. With the help of new friends, Percy must endure a journey full of mythological creatures to restore peace between the gods.

The show opens on Feb. 23, and continues on weekends—with limited matinees scheduled—through March 16.

Read more about the local production of "The Lightning Thief" from one of the show's cast members, Sydney Hoiberg, who wrote an opinion piece about the teen crew's experience with SVCT that appears on page 6 in this newspaper.

COMING TO THE THEATER

South Valley Civic Theatre's production of "The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical" opens Feb. 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. The show continues on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through March 16. For more information and to order tickets, visit svct.org.

Local youth produce new SVCT show

South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming production, "The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical," is making its way to the stage Feb. 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

The show is based on the popular book "The Lightning Thief" by author Rick Riordan, which was turned into a musical in 2017. The story follows 12-year-old Percy Jackson, who finds out he is a son of a Greek god and is introduced to a world that has been hidden from him his whole life. With the help of new friends Annabeth and Grover, Percy must endure a journey full of mythological creatures to restore peace between the gods.

Like Percy, many of our local teens are taking up their own quests and challenging themselves during this production. As a cast member myself, I've been given the unique opportunity to give a firsthand point of view of our show's teen involvement. Crew member Clara Shem-Tov, 16, is the teen assistant producer for the show, being mentored by producers Jenn Oliphant and Malisha Kumar.

"This is the first time I've seen an opportunity for teens to take on some of the roles that are normally filled by adults," Shem-Tov said, also mentioning that she has been able to teach others what she knows about lighting and other tech positions.

"It feels amazing to not only leave my mark onstage, but to leave it backstage too," said Paige DeRosa, 16, who plays Sally Jackson as well as various ensemble roles. DeRosa was able to choose her own costume, wrote a research paper on Medusa, and helped paint and build sets.

The show began production last December with a cast of more than 20, along with a few local teens who were casted to be a part of the live band. They've been mentored

by the show's vocal and music director, Brian Bourke and Mark Wong.

As rehearsals progressed, cast members were given chances to be dance captains or leads in their vocal section. The ability to rely on yourself and the feeling of independence that came with it was prominent during the practice times.

Another crew member, Bella Tankersley, 14, is assisting in more ways than one on the show. She is the stage manager, assistant director, and dramaturg. "It has been so much fun both meeting people and seeing the entire thing come to life. Plus I get to help make it all happen, you know?"

Claire Oliphant, 14, is assisting with costuming, props, and a cast member as well, and is being mentored by Lorraine Bell, a well-known costumer for SVCT. "She's been amazing and has made me feel so useful and included," Oliphant said.

The lead teen director, E.M. Lasky, 19, is making his directorial debut with help from Andrew Cummings and mentor director Max Tarlton.

"It's teachers like them who elevate my experience and perspective as a creative. One of those things you learn in theater is that collaboration is not just important, it is essential," said Lasky.

This production is a great representation of what it means to accomplish feats you never thought possible. The work done throughout the show has been shared in more ways than one, with each cast and crew member playing a vital part in bringing the thrilling musical to the Playhouse.

Sydney Hoiberg is a 17-year-old junior at Gilroy High School who regularly does shows with the South Valley Civic Theatre. "The Lightning Thief" opens Feb. 23, and runs weekends through March 16 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road in Morgan Hill. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit svct.org.