

Humor and heartbreak hit the stage in 'Fun Home'

Local adaptation coming to South Valley Nov. 7

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By [Calvin Nuttall](#) November 3, 2025



The cast of South Valley Civic Theatre's "Fun Home." Photo by Chris Foster/graphics by Jason Leong

South Valley Civic Theatre's production of "Fun Home" explores how one woman revisits her fractured childhood with a closeted father through the lens of memory, blending humor with heartbreak in a wandering journey through family secrets, missed opportunities and, ultimately, forgiveness and acceptance.

Based on the graphic memoir of noted lesbian author Alison Bechdel (portrayed by Katherine Thomassen), the musical follows Alison's inner self-reflection as she recalls her childhood and upbringing while two other actors portray younger versions of herself as memories unfold in organic, unordered fragments.

“Instead of following small Alison, then medium Alison, then adult Alison chronologically, it tells different stories from different points in her life,” Thomassen said. “I think that’s a more accurate retelling of how our memories work.”

Thomassen remains onstage for the entire 90-minute show, serving as both the primary character for scenes that take place in the present, and narrator for her own memories when the younger Alisons take to the stage.

Directed by Tressa Bender, the acclaimed musical opens Nov. 7 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse and runs through Nov. 23. Winner of five 2015 Tony Awards including Best Musical, Best Score and Best Book, “Fun Home” was the first Broadway show to feature a lesbian protagonist when it debuted in 2014.

The musical explores Bechdel’s relationship with her closeted gay father, Bruce, who ran a funeral home, referred to as the “Fun Home” by the Bechdel family. The narrative begins when Alison reaches age 43, the same age her father was when he died after being hit by a truck, a death she believes was suicide, though he left no note.

“She’s looking back with new perspective, understanding not only what things must have been like, but also the historical context of where the LGBT community was at that point,” Thomassen said.

Eric Mellum, who plays Bruce, describes the character as “a product of his generation,” a man expected to marry and provide for a family while struggling with his repressed homosexuality.

“When his daughter goes off to college and discovers her identity and sexuality, it triggers things for him,” Mellum said. “She’s able to be open in a way he never could, and it destabilizes his world. He sings about how the boundaries of his world have changed, how the rules he was supposed to live by have gotten messed up.”

Bruce never comes out publicly, Mellum said, though everyone in town knows “what kind of man he is,” in Bruce’s own words. Even when his daughter comes out to him, he remains deeply uncomfortable discussing it.

Bender describes “Fun Home” as a “tragicomedy,” with the central tragedy being that father and daughter never get to support each other in their shared identity.

“Alison wrestles with whether her coming out contributed to why he died,” Bender said. “It’s heavier subject matter than you normally see on stage, but it’s a beautiful show with many beautiful moments.”

The production doesn’t shy away from difficult aspects of Bruce’s life, including relationships with underage boys, though Bender said the material is “handled as sensitively as possible.”

“Bruce is a complicated character with unsavory parts,” she said. “Throughout all of this, Alison still loves her father, even though he’s done terrible things.”

Mellum said Bruce shouldn’t be viewed simply as a villain, but as a complex and flawed character with moments of light and dark.

“There are times where you can look at a scene and think, ‘Oh, Bruce is a villain,’ but he is really a real guy,” Mellum said. “Some of these things that land as villainous to someone else, you can find a lens of what he is trying to accomplish as a teaching moment for his daughter. Maybe it doesn’t land, maybe it was scarring and traumatic, but it wasn’t his intent. That is, I think, super real.”

The show balances its heavier themes with humor drawn from the chaos of Small Alison's childhood, and softer moments through Medium Alison's college romance with her first girlfriend, Joan, whose confident identity as a lesbian helps Alison accept her own sexuality.

"Medium Alison's entire college experience with her first love is very light-hearted and warm," Bender said. "It helps balance things."

The nine-person cast will be accompanied by a 10-piece live orchestra playing scores which range from "fun, bouncy, Jackson 5-inspired numbers" to haunting duets and emotional acapella solos.

"The musical does what the book can't; it gives characters moments to share what Alison's belief of their inner thoughts were," Bender said. "This family has such difficulty communicating. In the musical moments, we get to see how they actually feel."

While "Fun Home" deals heavily in LGBTQ themes, the cast and crew emphasized the show's universal appeal.

"There's stuff about unresolved expressions of love between family members, upsets that happen that never really got complete," Mellum said. "I think everybody has something they can relate to regardless of their family situation."

"I asked everyone who auditioned for the show to tell me how they related to the show," Bender said. "You cannot be in this show unless you feel it. Everyone had a different answer, every person who auditioned had a different element that they could identify within the show. You will find something."

Thomassen said anyone who has ever struggled to see their parents as fully three-dimensional people will find resonance in the story.

"Every time Alison tries to get herself to talk to her dad, I think, 'I really need to call my dad and have that heavy conversation,'" she said. "The more we see everyone fully, especially people we only get to see one side of, the more we can understand them as human beings."

Despite its tragic elements, Bender said the show ends on a hopeful note.

"The message is to acknowledge your past fully, but move forward from it," Thomassen said. "Rise above it."

"Fun Home" is recommended for ages 13 and up due to mature themes. For showtimes and to purchase tickets, visit svct.org/2025_funhome.