

## **‘The Prom’ brings fight for inclusion to South Valley stage**

Show opens June 20 at Morgan Hill Community Playhouse

<https://morganhilltimes.com/the-prom-brings-fight-for-inclusion-to-south-valley-stage/>

By [Calvin Nuttall](#) June 6, 2025



Kaitlyn Scadina (playing Emma Nolan) and Megan Dake-Merklinghaus (Alyssa Greene) will perform in South Valley Civic Theatre’s upcoming production of “The Prom.” Photo: Chris Foster

South Valley Civic Theatre will present the Tony-nominated musical “The Prom” beginning June 20 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, bringing a story of acceptance and inclusion to local audiences through song, dance and comedy.

Directed by Tressa Bender, the production follows a group of washed up Broadway actors who attempt to revive their careers by championing the cause of a teenage girl whose prom was canceled after she wanted to bring her girlfriend as her date.

“It was actually inspired by true events,” Bender said. “By celebrities who had become irrelevant, trying to become relevant again by taking up causes, specifically LGBTQ causes.”

The musical centers on Emma (portrayed by Kaitlyn Scadina), a high school student in Indiana whose school’s parent-teacher association cancels prom rather than allow her to attend with her girlfriend, Alyssa. Four Broadway performers—dubbed the “Fab 5” by Bender—arrive to intervene, though their bumbling first efforts initially complicate matters.

“We go to Indiana, and interrupt the middle of a giant PTA meeting,” said Michael Cuddy, who plays Barry Glickman. “They’re just starting to get things settled, and then in walk these interlopers, and chaos ensues.”

Jen Wheatonfox stars as “Dee Dee Allen,” the self-centered actress leading the Broadway contingent. The cast also includes AJ Jaffari as Trent Oliver, Natalie Fitzgibbons as Angie Dickinson, and Peter Mandel as Sheldon Saperstein. Kia Jones portrays Kaylee, the homophobic head cheerleader who bullies Emma.

“My character is very much in it for herself,” Wheatonfox said of Dee Dee. “Until she can’t hold out any longer.”

The story draws comparisons to the 1984 film “Footloose,” another tale of young people fighting for their right to dance and celebrate.

“When I describe it to my friends, I call it ‘gay Footloose,’” Cuddy said.

Despite the serious subject matter, Bender emphasizes that the musical avoids creating clear villains, instead focusing on characters who learn and grow throughout the story.

“I like to think there are no villains in this story,” she said. “By the end of the show, I think everybody learns and becomes a better person. It’s really about trying to shed people of their ignorance, rather than showing somebody as inherently evil.”

The production carries personal significance for several cast members. Cuddy, who is not gay but plays the flamboyantly gay Barry, consulted with friends in the LGBTQ+ community to authentically portray the character. Several of his children are also “stripes on the Pride flag,” he said, adding a personal element to his passion for the show’s message.



Pictured are “The Prom” cast members: AJ Jaffari as Trent Oliver; Jen Wheatonfox as Dee Dee Allen; Michael Cuddy as Barry Glickman; Natalie Fitzgibbons as Angie Dickinson; and Peter Mandel as Sheldon Saperstein. Photo: Chris Foster

“We live in a nice little blue bubble here in the Bay Area, and it’s not like that in the rest of the country,” he noted. “It hurts to see it, and to think that my kids could be subject to that. So, I think anything that raises awareness about gay rights is good.”

Jones, who will serve as president of her school’s Pride Club next year, said the show’s representation matters deeply to her.

“I think queer representation is so important in the media,” Jones said. “I just think this show has the perfect balance between comedy and seriousness, and I like the way it delivers its message. It has to be one of my favorite shows, because I think the message is so important, the delivery is so important, and the representation is so important.”

Bender believes the musical is well-suited for Morgan Hill audiences, despite the potentially controversial subject matter.

“I think that ‘The Prom’ brings a kind of heavy topic to light in a very heartfelt, light-hearted way,” she said. “So much of this story is about acceptance and inclusion, not being political.

“We are currently in a time where LGBTQ+ stories are once again being erased and silenced. Theater in itself is a form of protest, and we owe it to the LGBTQ+ community who helped build theater to continue to tell these stories.”

The production features a 15-piece live orchestra conducted by Miguel Ledezma, an unusually large musical ensemble for the local community theater. Multiple choreographers contributed to the show's dance numbers, including Bender, producer Ashley Bortolussi and cast member Natalie Fitzgibbons.

"What is really interesting and neat about having so many different people involved, just like there are so many different styles of music showcased in this show, the dancing is different in almost every piece," Bender said. "It doesn't look like the same person choreographed it, and yet it all fits together perfectly."

*"The Prom" opens June 20 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Ticket information is available through South Valley Civic Theatre's website at [svct.org/2025\\_prom](http://svct.org/2025_prom).*