



Spring Awakening: An extraordinary rock music production by the San Jose Rep

By [Cynthia Corral](#)

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Melchior (Jason Hite) struts to the front as the rest of the teens dance in the background. Photo by Kevin Berne.

[San Jose Repertory Theatre](#) has opened their 2011-2012 season with a blockbuster of a show, raising the bar in every aspect of theater production. [Spring Awakening](#), with its provocative content, is the kind of show which should usher in a whole new generation of theater lovers, and its high level of technical and acting talent also proves that there is no need to head north to see a fantastic production when you live in the South Bay.

You might think that a show about oppressed, sexually repressed teenagers in 19th century Germany might be stuffy and boring. But pair this storyline with some fantastic rock music and you have incredibly moving tales of lust, love, rape, physical abuse, pregnancy, abortion, homosexuality and suicide. What does rock music have to do with 19th century

German teens? What does rock music NOT have to do with ANY teens? Rock music was created to express the pain, frustration, angst and experiences of youth. It is actually a perfect pairing, and works on every level in this show. And although the story deals with difficult topics and situations, and will bring tears to your eyes, it also ends with a song that celebrates hope, and love, and living. It brought an immediate and deserved standing ovation with not many dry eyes in the house.

Although the SJ Rep has always brought in great acting talent for their shows, I will admit to some worries about whether they could find such a capable large cast which requires dancing, very talented singers, as well as such a high level of acting... but the Rep went way beyond my expectations. The singing was on par with any Broadway show I've ever seen, and the acting from everyone was superb. Most notable for me was **Eryn Murman** as Wendla, capturing our sympathy, emotions and attention from the very first scene to the very end notes. The entire cast was easily as talented as I've ever seen on the Repertory stage, and as a whole represents a great history of Broadway and musical experience. Every single cast member was extraordinary, including the SJSU students who absolutely held up their end of the talent requirement.



The girls demand to know the truth about the birds and the bees. Photo by Kevin Berne.

[Sonya Tayeh](#), known from "**So You think You can Dance**", was brought in as choreographer for the show, and while I am sure she's going to help fill theater seats (she certainly made ME excited about the show), the choreography was not what I expected. Known for her quirky modern dances on the television show, she kept the dancing in the background here, using it only to express the thoughts, feelings and frustrations of the characters, while letting the



Moritz (Miguel Cervantes) sings about leaving it all behind while Ilse (Zarah Mahler) begs him to come back. Photo by Kevin Berne.

story shine through. It is what a choreographer *should* do in a show like this, and I believe she did it perfectly. As a side note, she was in the audience on Opening Night and was absolutely gorgeous.

The music of course had a starring role in this show. The band, as put together by the Rep's own **Dolores Duran-Cefalu**, was on stage, played to perfection, and benefited from the best sound direction I've heard locally with the possible exception of [Opera San Jose](#) [opening Saturday!]. Sitting anywhere in this audience was like sitting in front of any Broadway musical production, and did great justice to **Duncan Sheik's** music.

Once again, I'm not letting this review go without mentioning that in recent years the San Jose Repertory Theater has gone over and above in set, lighting and media design, and they've outdone themselves in this show as well. And once again I see the names of **John Iacovelli** and **David Lee Cuthbert** involved. If it's possible to fill a set with emotion, these two can do it, and it's hard to deny that when they are involved, the set will also have a starring role.

This is a show about teenagers who are dealing with adult themes and problems, just as all teenagers do, while also having little to no control over their lives. This is the core difficulty of being a teenager. Although there are mature themes explored on stage (masturbation, nudity, sexual situations and suicide), the show was not as explicit as I had been led to expect – but parents should be aware that it IS a provocative show. Use your best judgment regarding your own teenager, but anyone 18 and up should head over to the Rep immediately and get a ticket. Book writer and lyricist **Steven Sater** was also in the audience on opening night and he looked pleased. I truly hope we did make him proud, as I know that I am certainly proud of **Director Rick Lombardo** and our local San Jose Repertory Theatre. I cannot imagine how Mr. Lombardo plans to top this show, but we have six more shows to look forward to this year. If there was ever a time to [buy season tickets](#), this IS the year.

[Spring Awakening](#)
San Jose Repertory Theatre
September 1 – 25



Wendla (Eryn Murman) and Melchior (Jason Hite) try to fight their urges. Photo by Kevin Berne.