



## REVIEW – Spring Awakening – San Jose Rep

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I didn't have an awkward childhood. Not that I recall anyway. I don't actually remember when and how I was informed about the birds and the bees. I'm not a parent. I much prefer a straight play to a musical. I'm not even a fan of Duncan Sheik's music. Technically, I'm in this small and weird audience demographic that shouldn't relate to the topic matter of *Spring Awakening* and shouldn't really enjoy it. But, not unlike puberty, this show is a game changer.

I initially saw this show last year when Broadway San Jose brought it to the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts. At that time I went into the show with no expectations and very little knowledge about its history or content. I found myself in awe with every aspect of it. This time, knowing that the show was so tremendous, made for a very different trip to the theatre. Indeed, the bar was set exceedingly high going into the Rep last Friday. And, I wasn't disappointed.

I get chills when I see an ensemble that gels as well as this cast does on stage. Intimate, nuanced, sincere acting, great voices, flawless musicians, dynamic technical elements, and compelling staging all made this a triumph. Aside from some small sound issues (vocals were well-balanced volume-wise with the band, but not always perfectly balanced with regards to solos and chorus) I think this was a fantastic opening to the rep's season.

Sonya Tayeh's choreography is strong and well performed by the cast and good for the space too. If you're familiar with her work on *So You Think You Can Dance*, you will recognize the edgy, angsty, narrative style. Although creative and well performed, I did feel at times that the dance had SUCH a voice, was SUCH a strong visual interpretation, that it distracted from the lyrics, music, and acting. Instead of complimenting or accenting the action it took on its own life. I know that probably sounds odd, to say maybe it did its job too well, but when thrown in with chaotic graphic video imagery it all seemed a bit too overwhelming not allowing me to take in any of it. And that was for someone who likes and knows the music and isn't trying to "follow along" as closely.

In some places instead of being a cohesive voice, the dance and the visuals competed for my attention. IN a handfull of cases, all these components doing their own thing (albeit well) made for a seemingly disjointed vision. Or perhaps just splintered the vision off in different directions. Now, I can easily see that as being an intentional artistic choice. The coming of age confusion, mirrored by the different methods of storytelling is a fair and certainly smart possibility, just one that wasn't obviously intentional to me and one I might not have personally chosen. I think there is enough going on to communicate that choice if certain elements were just dialed down slightly.

That being said, I dreamt that the entire cast and crew carved their name in that gorgeous, exquisitely metaphorical and functional table (used SO well in staging and choreography) and gave it to me for Christmas. I'm no psychic of anything, but I made space for it in my apartment. I'm just saying.

On a serious note, I know that times have changed. Growing up for many is tumultuous to begin with and I think it's harder today than it has been in generation. Pressures have increased and our youth are subject to them earlier, outlets to release these pressures have decreased, the world isn't as safe a place as it was even when I was growing up and kids spend less time being kids it seems. In light of headlines where teens kill themselves at alarming rates due to pressures, and teen pregnancy is on the rise I feel this show provides a huge opportunity. Take your children to this show. Make time for art, family and life-saving dialogue. Yes the content is heavy, but as much as this experience informs adults, it is cathartic for our youth. There is nothing in this show that your teens (and probably even preteens) don't either already know or desperately need to know and there is huge healing in knowing that others feel the way you do. There is a vital conversation that starts with *Spring Awakening*. It's one that I wouldn't hesitate to take advantage of had I kids of that age in my life. Not one second of hesitation.

Although, I personally missed some of the elements from the original Broadway version, I totally respect and appreciate the caliber of talent in and the choices made for this production. I know it's not fair to compare but, you kind of never forget your first. On its own, this is a really wonderful production of a surprising, heartbreaking, layered, entertaining, beautiful, relevant, important musical. A solid 4 1/2 out of 5 jewels in the tiara for this royally "guilty one." *Spring Awakening* plays through September 25th at [The San Jose Repertory Theatre](#) in San Jose.