



Wonderful unity highlights SJ Rep's 'Spring Awakening'



[David John Chavez](#), San Jose Theater Arts Examiner
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(l to r) Moritz (Miguel Cervantes), Melchior (Jason Hite), and Wendla (Eryn Murman) join together to sing "The Song of Purple Summer" in San Jose Rep's production of Spring Awakening.

Credits: Kevin Berne

It's sometimes hard to imagine that at one time, we were our children's age. My daughter is seven now, and I shudder to think that in three years time, she will be the same age I was when I first learned about the birds and the bees. And not only was I learning about all that cool stuff, I made sure that anyone who would give me the time of day knew what the heck was going on too. Yup, I feel some serious karma embarrassment on the horizon.

So I had to laugh at one scene in particular in San Jose Repertory Theatre's stupendously solid production of "Spring Awakening." It was a mother who had the gargantuan task of teaching her daughter Wendla about the finer things in life. And while she explained what makes boys and girls tick, she couldn't face her, covering her face with a jacket.

While there is plenty of humor in reminiscing about learning the joys of nature, what "Spring Awakening" does so well is creates and shares the other side that is not exactly modern. The guilt and shame of having a wet dream.

The curiosity of stroking a sensuous curve, and unfortunately for the character's who existed in the original author Frank Wedekind's world in the late 1800's, the devastation and loss that flesh comes with.

"Spring Awakening" is a show that speaks to anyone who has ever been freaked out about what changes have occurred in their bodies and just had to stew in their own ignorance. In this case, a guilty pall is cast over young people like Moritz Stiefel (Miguel Cervantes) and Wendla Bergmann (Eryn Murman), who receives such poor information about sex, it's a wonder they don't try to make love to a tree. But highly intellectual Melchior assists Moritz with an essay upon his request, complete with illustrations, on sex and the nuances that come with it.

Artistic director Rick Lombardo is absolutely in his element here, creating spirited movement and searing unity at every turn, making committed choices with his staging at every turn, even utilizing some wonderfully deft video creations designed by David Lee Cuthbert, which helped shape the story even further. And Sonya Tayeh, she of the modern jazz choreography which has been featured time and again on the hit show "So You Think You Can Dance," creates not only physical body art that soars, but movement that smolders.

The Rep's season, Lombardo's third at the helm, gets off to a dashing start, and features a most unique collaboration between undergraduate actors from San Jose State's theatre department, community theatre vets, and hot, young Broadway stars. Because theatre is such a tiered system, rarely do I see a play where so many of the performers I've been able to see in just about every piece of theatre I have attended or reviewed. The fact that so much varied talent comes forward at a repertory theatre venue is remarkable.

The show is marked with wonderful performances from top to bottom. Hite, who was magnificent in Berkeley Rep's "Girlfriend," playing a struggling, closeted gay athlete, continues to find his form as a dapper leading man. His counterpart Murman played so well a girl who embraced her innate curiosity, and was magnificent in a violent, yet tender scene where she desired Melchior to help her "feel."

With a sharp, talented and wonderful ensemble cast and a band lead by conductor Dolores Duran-Cefalu, given the task of leading some sharp Duncan Sheik compositions, and the show cohered splendidly well. Whether it was the high energy tune "My Junk," the joyous tune of discovery "I Believe," or the hopeful idealism of "The Song of Purple Summer," Sheik's lyrics were given the reverential treatment here. Unfortunately, the reverence didn't always make it to the actual sound system, which seemed a bit too heavy on bass and too light on brights.

What works so well for the show is that even though we live in modern times, where shock value is all but an afterthought, the show still feels risqué, dangerous, and thrilling. Watching characters you come to respect and admire allows the audience to be sucked into the proceedings, hoping that these children would finally get someone to look past their own piety, and look within these children's hearts and souls. They would find that there is not just a yearning for lust, but for love and for knowledge.

The show, without spoiling a thing, has a joyous conclusion. I wasn't totally sure what to make of it, but if we wanted to feel any sense of hope, the conclusion was quite necessary upon further review. Even though the story has its share of triumph and tragedy, it is the hope of a better tomorrow that allows a young mind to climb out of the doldrums of winter, and awaken to a perfect spring day. And ultimately, all will know the fulfillment of wonder of purple summer.

EXAMINE IT FOR YOURSELF

San Jose Repertory Theatre presents "***Spring Awakening***"

Book by Steven Sater

Music and Lyrics by Sater and Duncan Sheik

Directed by Rick Lombardo

Choreography by Sonya Tayeh

The word: Wonderful, eclectic casting and sharp staging by Lombardo and Tayeh make this a new "Awakening" for a new day

Through Sept. 25th

San Jose Repertory Theatre

101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA 95113

Tickets range from \$17.50 - \$79

For tickets, call (408) 367-7255 or visit the Rep's official [website](#).

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