

Cut Footloose!

Morgan Hill Times

Posted: Friday, March 12, 2004 12:00 am | Updated: 8:23 am, Tue Dec 6, 2011.

For any of you who consider yourself young at 30 years old, here's a news flash for you: The stars of South Valley Civic Theatre's production of 'Footloose' weren't even born when Kevin Bacon was dancing his way through the original 1984 movie.

Feeling any grey hairs popping up yet?



Dustin Van Gundy, playing the lead role of Ren McCormack, dances in South Valley Civic Theater's production of 'Footloose.' The musical opens at 8 p.m. today at the Morgan Hill Community Theater.

In fact, nearly all of the cast that tried out for parts for one of the '80s most period telling films had never even seen the movie before.

"I watched it the day after (getting the part)," said Dustin Van Gundy, who plays Bacon's lead role of Ren McCormack in the show. "I saw parts of it on TV."

However, not to add insult to injury, the eighth to 12th graders who are taking part in the show, rather than laughing at some of the goofy culture of the period, have actually embraced it.

"It's not necessarily weird, it's a lot of fun," said Dustin Van Gundy, who plays Bacon's lead role of Ren McCormack in the show.

Ashley Little, who plays McCormack's love interest as Ariel Moore, also hasn't had a problem adjusting to the role.

"Not at all, we actually are really getting used to it," she said. "We're getting more into the '80s and giving up some of the new millennium."

Like Van Gundy, Little had never seen the show before her tryout.

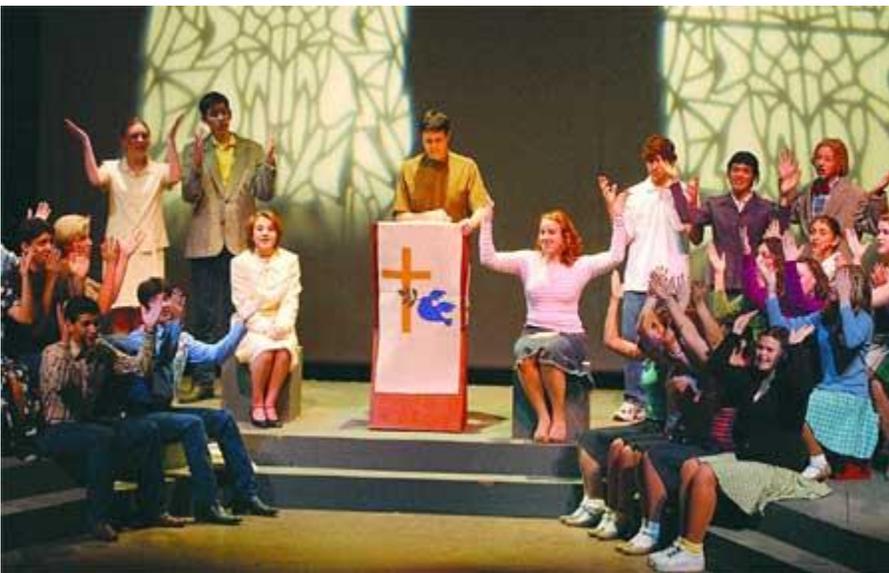
"I had never seen it on stage and didn't see (the movie) until a few weeks ago," said Little, a 17-year-old senior at Gilroy High School who has been on stage since she was 3 years old and has done countless shows with SVCT.



Antonio Silva, playing Willard Hewitt, does not take kindly to city boy McCormack's comments about his attire.

According to Director Carol Harris, while they may not have known about the show then, all of them have gotten acquainted with it.

"They can get it for \$14 at Target, and they have a CD they've been listening to," she said. "I think you can see that they've gotten into it. Especially the lead players have taken it to heart."



The cast of 'Footloose,' including Jeremy Borgia, center, Michele Upton, left, and lead female Ashley Litte, seated right, sing the musical's opening number.

Produced by Janet Espinosa and Marie Haluza, "Footloose" opens with McCormack leaving a life of excitement in the big city to move to a small town where he finds that all kinds of fun – including dancing – have been banned because of the power of the local reverend, played by Jeremy Borgia or Morgan Hill.

"It's the same premise as the movie: 'It's illegal to dance in Bomont,'" Haluza said.

Complicating matters for McCormack is that while he adjusts to small town life he falls for the reverend's daughter (Moore) and tries to set up an end-of-the-school-year dance without getting thrown out of town.

"It's got a lot of singing and dancing and not a lot of dialogue," Haluza said. "The Broadway version adds about six songs to the movie version."

The SVCT rendition of the play uses a simple stage that allows the main focus to be on the 26 cast members.

“The audience uses their imagination,” said Harris, who last directed SVCT in “1940s Radio Hour” a few months ago. “A table here, a wagon there.”



‘Footloose’ Director and pianist Carol Harris plays the keyboards during a rehearsal for the show.

All of the show’s scene changes are planned to take 10 seconds or less, as the theater makes use of lighting and basic props to quickly change between scenes.

“The set is very simple,” Haluza said. “We don’t shut the curtain. In the opening scene, when we tell the story, they go from Chicago to the town hall to the church, and we need to use areas on the stage to show that.”

The only complicated scene change is a railroad trestle that lowers down onto the stage.

Little said that having a relatively small cast and an open stage has helped the actors to become friends during the show.

“The cast is small,” she said. “You get to know people on a personal level.”

For Antonio Silva, who plays the role of McCormack’s friend, Willard Hewitt, it was a first-time experience on the community theater stage.

“My music teacher, Lori Paulini, said there was a show coming up I should be in. It was kind of a guilt thing (being talked into it),” he said. “I’d been singing a lot of Broadway songs, and she said I should be in a show.”

The 17-year-old Gilroyan is a senior at Palma High School and takes private singing lessons through the Music Tree in Morgan Hill. He said that while he was apprehensive about being in the show, he came away learning about being an actor.

“I’ve learned how to act better,” he said. “I’ve learned a lot about stage performance.”

Researching the role wasn’t too difficult for the actors since most of them are playing roles of high school students.

“It’s nice,” Little said. “You go out to research your role and it’s pretty easy.”

Van Gundy, a 16-year-old Gilroyan who attends Monte Vista High School in Watsonville, has been in seven SVCT shows, including "1940s Radio Hour." He said that while he learned a lot about the story of "Footloose" by watching the movie, he isn't about to try and act just like Bacon's character did in the 1984 version of the show.

"I try not to copy other people," he said. "The only thing I do like Kevin Bacon is go up on my toes."

South Valley Civic Theatre's production of 'Footloose' opens tonight at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse and runs through March 21. Tickets are available at BookSmart, 778-6467, the community center, 782-0008 or at www.SVCT.org/ Details: 842-SHOW.

Theatre Notes

by Paul Myrvold

Footloose at South Valley Civic Theatre

It was such joy to see the South Valley Civic Theatre teenagers singing and dancing their hearts out in the funny, touching and delightful musical *Footloose*. Under the experienced direction of **Carol Harris** and with the excellent, creative choreography of **Elizabeth Farotte**, the show, based on the 1984 film of the same name, gives the kids a chance to shine in a work they clearly cared about. The plot centers around Ren, (**Dustin Van Gundy**), a hip, urban kid who finds himself transplanted from Chicago to Bomont in a state very much like Texas. He suffers acute culture shock in the town that has banned, among other things, dancing. He soon gains a reputation for trouble, but finds friends and love and a way to bring the little cow town out of its depressing funk.

The songs by Tom Snow and Dean Pitchford (with additional music by Eric Carmen, Sammy Hagar, Kenny Loggins and Jim Steinman) are well sung, especially by **Ashley Little** as Ren's paramour, the rebellious preacher's kid Ariel. Miss Little, ably backed by the trio of **Cari Love**,

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Shelly Haluza and **Rachel Rentfrow**, burn up the stage in the first act number "Holding Out for a Hero." **Antonio Silva** as Ren's best friend Willard, with the masculine backup by **Dustin Van Gundy**, **Nick Campelli**, **Josh Harvey** and **Andrew Mantilla**,

steals the show, runs away with it, then stops it cold with "Mama Says," a number so sure-fire it has

a built in encore. **Valentina Ostankovich** delivers a beautiful, authentic rendition of "Let's Make Believe We're in Love" as country/western dance hall singer Irene. In the adult roles of Reverend Moore, his wife Vi and Ren's mother Ethel, **Jeremy Borgia**, **Michele Upton** and **Trista Caudill** show vocal power coupled with a burgeoning maturity that allows them to hold the stage with authority in their several emotionally charged songs.

Miss Farotte created dances for the young performers that both suit and challenge their abilities. Well rehearsed and cleanly executed, the delightful choreography ambitiously detailed and often richly humorous.

The excellent musical combo of Ms. Harris on keyboard, **Stephanie Woehrmann** on bass guitar, **Tom Drake** and **David Almeida** on guitars and **Tim Duffy** on drums achieves just the right balance with the singers and drives the show home flawlessly.

