

## Gilroy Dispatch

# Teens turn comic strip into hilarious, lively production

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In just eight short weeks, 41 typical teens from Morgan Hill, Gilroy and Hollister have been transformed into stereotypical hillbillies of Dogpatch, USA. Twenty-three years after SVCT'S first production of "Li'l Abner," the company has again chosen the musical comedy for its teen offering. Created by Al Capp in 1934, "Li'l Abner" is regarded by some as the greatest comic strip of all time. Capp took advantage of social issues, government, big-business and counter culture icons to bring wickedly funny social satire to America's newspapers. His Sadie Hawkins Day race became a national institution, celebrated every leap year in towns across the USA. In 1957, with script by Norman Panama and Melvin Frank and music by Johnny Mercer and Gene de Paul, the musical based on Capp's characters was born.

Guided by director Rosalind Farotte's masterful sense of staging and attention to detail, Mitzi Imagawa's lively choreography and music direction by yours truly, the teens offer a lively and entertaining show that shouldn't be missed.

Although space does not permit mention of every performer, I would like to give recognition to a few. Trent Peschke as General Bullmoose gives an outstanding performance. His intuitive sense of comedic timing is that of a gifted actor. Megan Griffin is a feisty, energetic Mammy Yokum. When she and Chris Bezanson, playing Pappy Yokum, go at it, the audience roars. Oscar Leon, making his stage debut as Earthquake McGoon, commands the stage with every word and mannerism of his hillbilly character. Gilroy High junior Brandan Sanchez is perfectly cast as Li'l Abner. Not only does he look as though he just stepped out of the comic strip, but his singing voice is as smooth as silk and a treat to the ears. Brandon and Pearl Bass, playing Daisy Mae, fill the theater with magic when they sing "Love in a Home."

Pearl, an eighth grader at Solasano Middle School, spent the 2008-09 school year in Bielefeld, Germany as an exchange student while her counterpart, Miriam Braun, spent the same year at Gilroy High learning about life in America and singing in the GHS choir. Pearl lived with Miriam's family and Miriam lived with the Bases. While immersed in German culture, Pearl studied singing and returned home with a beautifully developed voice. Pearl's dad, Jonathan, is one of the producers of "Li'l Abner." Her mom, Heather, teaches at Gateway School in San Martin. Byron, Pearl's brother who is a sophomore at Gilroy High School, also spent a year in Germany. A talented musician, Byron studies violin with Lori Franke and plays the trombone in the "Li'l Abner" orchestra.