

## SVCT's children's show tells the tale of the Ugly Duckling in modern style

"Honk! Jr." is a delightful journey full of fun and important lessons for young people

<https://morganhilllife.com/2022/10/12/honk-review/>

By Camille Bounds



Children performers in "Honk, Jr." dressed in duckling costumes. Photo courtesy Chris Foster/SVCT

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A delightful aura floats over a cast of junior role players from six to around 13 who give their all in “Honk! Jr.” Based on the Hans Christian Anderson fairytale “The Ugly Duckling,” South Valley Civic Theater’s children show provides a lesson against intolerance and bullying.

The show tells the tale of an odd-looking duckling cruelly nicknamed “Ugly” who goes on an adventure away from his barnyard home and learns some important life lessons in the South Valley Civic Theatre show. It opened Oct. 1 for a four-weekend run at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

The entire cast seems to have a dedicated good time as well as the audience. Where did SVCT find these young performers who give full honesty and energy to their roles and seem to be having the time of their lives? From the littlest to the eldest, everyone delivers.

“Ugly” is played wonderfully by Miriam Shem-Tov. After he is born, he is teased by his brothers and sisters and friends about his appearance. He is seduced away from the duckpond by the cunning “Cat” (Ashlen Hsu) who schemes to eat the young duckling for dinner. “Ugly” escapes the feline’s clutches but becomes lost as he sets out to find his way back to his duck pond. In his adventures, he encounters a beautiful swan named Penny (Grace Butler) tangled in a fishing line. He saves her and the two birds form a close friendship.



The rest of the cast is made up of Chloe Grotz as Ida (Ugly’s mom), Alexis Hsu as Fluff (Duckling), Goose, Froglet, Alice Ball as Bullfrog, Poultry, Goose, Ava Meehan as Greylag, Poultry, Frog, Brenden Oliphant as “Drake,” Cady Oliphant as Billy (Duckling), Snowy (Gooselet), Froglet, Claire Oliphant as Grace, Dot (Goose), Frog, Gabby Oliphant as “Maureen,” Camera Crew, Goose, Genie Oliphant as Beaky (Duckling), Barnacles (Goose), Froglet, Grace Butler Penny, Poultry, Blizzard Female Solo, Izzy Oliphant as Duckling, Goose, Froglet, Jace Puente as Downy (Duckling), Pinkfoot (Goose), Froglet, Julia Tracy as Henrietta, Swans, Camera Crew, and Liam Grotz as Poultry, Camera Crew, Goose, Frog.



Christine Carrillo's choreography is charming and not overdone. Vocal Director Lynette Oliphant keeps the voices holding notes in the right places. Lorraine Bell's costumes fit the moment. Tressa Bender's direction keeps these little "hams" in their place and gives everyone the spot they are supposed to be in. What a brave lady! Producers Marianne Snook and Jenn Oliphant hold the production together. Sound and lighting by Spencer Oliphant and set design by Tressa Bender bring a professional touch to the performance.



Photo courtesy Chris Foster/SVCT

But the prize for organization and always having everyone properly dressed and there for a cue goes to the "Kid Wranglers," the team of Rashonda Butler, Cambria Pace, Cate Pace, Tammy Simpson, Stephanie Snyder and Rachel Tracy.

At my performance no one missed a cue and everyone knew where they belonged on stage because there was someone there to be sure the person and the moment was in their proper place. They deserve an award. Try organizing a "flock" of kids performing as barnyard animals for 90 minutes.

Lately with the news so unnerving, "Honk Jr" is here at just the right time. The kids are wonderful and the story has a fine message and is a joy to watch. Go relax and have a delightful journey.

# MORGAN HILL THE TIMES

**South Valley Civic Theatre's family-friendly 'Honk! Jr.' opens Oct. 1**

**<https://morganhilltimes.com/south-valley-civic-theatre-family-friendly-honk-jr/>**

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#)

September 27, 2022



"Honk! Jr.," South Valley Civic Theatre's first children's show in three years, opens Oct. 1 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Photo: Chris Foster

South Valley Civic Theatre's upcoming performance of "Honk! Jr." is truly a family affair, in more ways than one.

Adapted for the youngsters, the family-friendly show is based on “The Ugly Duckling” by Hans Christian Andersen, which follows a baby duck named Ugly who is separated from his mother. On his journey to reunite with her, Ugly makes friends who accept his differences.

On the production side, “Honk! Jr.,” which opens Oct. 1 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, is filled with families and siblings who make up the cast and crew. That is perhaps most apparent with the Oliphant family of Gilroy, which includes Jenn as one of the producers, Spencer as the sound and lighting designer, Lynette as the vocal director, and the youngsters, Brenden, Cady, Claire, Genie and Izzy, are all performers in the show.

Claire, who will soon turn 13, performs as Grace the queen duck and Dot the goose. It’s her first time performing in theater, she noted, adding that she has always wanted to be in a show.

She added that “Honk! Jr.” has a positive message that is important for everyone.

“It echoes the same thing my family teaches, and that is kindness is key,” Claire said. “Our differences are special, not ugly. The world will be better if people accept differences.”

Gabriella Horta, 13, of Gilroy agreed, saying that the show has a strong anti-bullying message.

“I feel that it has a very inspiring message, especially for the young kids in the audience and in the play,” she said. “People will leave here feeling good about themselves and will learn something of value.”

Gabriella plays Maureen, the aunt of all the ducklings, and said that her character is “pretty silly and fun to play.”

A veteran of the stage since she was 6 years old, Gabriella has performed in four other South Valley Civic Theatre shows, most recently [“Beauty and the Beast.”](#)

She added that rehearsals, which began in early August, have been going smoothly, but one thing has surprised her.

“I didn’t expect to have as much fun as I’m having,” she said. “I like how fun the play is in general. It’s a kids’ show, so you just get to have fun with it.”

Director Tressa Bender described “Honk! Jr.” as the “perfect anti-bullying, pro-friendship” show. It’s also the theater company’s first children’s show in three years, due to pandemic challenges.

“A lot of the kids are performing for the very first time,” she said. “There’s a little apprehension, a little fear. Then there’s the kids that are so excited to be back.”

Costume and props designer Lorraine Bell said one of the challenges of working with children ages 4-13 is trying to keep up with their energy while helping them remain focused, adding that the older children are doing a great job of leading the younger ones.

Bender said an important aspect of South Valley Civic Theatre’s children’s shows is that they allow the young performers to participate for free, which is crucial to eliminating barriers and getting the next generation interested in the performing arts.

"It's really great to support our youth in theater," she said. "Without them, theater doesn't have a future. By investing in our youth today, we get theater for tomorrow."

Bender added that the sets, built by parent volunteers, were inspired by the work of famed author and illustrator Eric Carle, best known for his picture book, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar."

And for the music?

"The songs are very catchy," Gabriella said. "They've been stuck in my head ever since we started."

*"Honk! Jr." by South Valley Civic Theatre runs weekends and Fridays from Oct. 1-22 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. For tickets and information, visit [svct.org/2022\\_honk](https://svct.org/2022_honk).*



## Family fun: SVCT's classic fairytale 'Honk! Jr.' has a powerful message

Show's message of tolerance is especially relevant in today's world

<https://morganhilllife.com/2022/09/16/family-fun-svcts-classic-fairytale-honk-jr-has-a-powerful-message/>

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Actors in "Honk! Jr." are back row from left: Brenden Oliphant, Miriam Shem-Tov, Chloe Grotz. Front row from left: Jace Puente, Alexis Hsu, Izzy Oliphant, Genie Oliphant, and Cady Oliphant. Photo courtesy Chris Foster/SVCT

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By Marty Cheek

An odd-looking duckling cruelly nicknamed “Ugly” goes on an adventure away from his barnyard home and learns some important life lessons in the South Valley Civic Theatre show “Honk! Jr.” It opens Oct. 1 for a four-weekend run at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

Based on Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling,” the junior version of the musical play is a fun way to introduce young people to theater, said director Tressa Bender. It is relatively short at about 90 minutes long (including intermission) and has about 20 young girls and boys in the cast.

“We encourage every age group to come and watch because it’s got something for everyone,” she said. “And it’s a great way to come and support the children of the South Valley. This is SVCT’s first children’s show in three years (because of COVID-19) and we’re starting over with a wonderful story.”

The show is especially relevant for today because it teaches a message of tolerance and showing kindness toward others, even if they might look or act differently, Bender said.

“It’s got a very strong anti-bullying message,” she said. “It’s about accepting yourself the way that you are. It’s OK to be a little odd.”



Photo courtesy Chris Foster/SVCT

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In the classic fairytale story, soon after “Ugly” (played by Miriam Shem-Tov) is born, he is teased by his brothers and sisters and friends about his appearance. He is seduced away from the duckpond by the



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“It's a lesson for people. It's great that we're growing up with such a diverse community and learning that everyone is beautiful and everyone has their own story and we're all different in our own ways.”

- Miriam Shem-Tov  
12-year-old Oakwood School sixth  
grader who plays "Ugly"

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cunning “Cat” (Ashlen Hsu) who schemes to eat the young duckling for dinner. “Ugly” escapes the feline’s clutches but becomes lost as he sets out to find his way back to his duck pond. In his adventures, he encounters a beautiful swan named Penny (Grace Butler) tangled in a fishing line. He saves her and the two birds form a close friendship.

As “Ugly,” Miriam Shem-Tov believes the story provides an important life lesson about how to treat people with kindness and compassion so that their inner beauty will shine.

“The lesson is that you can’t look just at the outside, you have to look in the inside and not just love someone because they’re (physically) beautiful,” said the 12-year-old who attends sixth grade at Oakwood School. “Ugly starts out as this really humiliated character. As he grows up, he discovers his friends who come from all over look different and he learns about all of their ways.”

By the end of the tale, he discovers he’s not really an aesthetically challenged farmyard fowl but in fact a really beautiful swan, she said. He learns to be confident and understand that everyone’s different.

“There’s beauty inside him that’s just waiting to appear,” Shem-Tov said. “It’s a lesson for people. It’s great that we’re growing up with such a diverse community and learning that everyone is beautiful and everyone has their own story and we’re all different in our own ways.”



Photo courtesy Chris Foster/SVCT

Chloe Grotz plays “Ida,” the mother of “Ugly.”

“She wants to make sure Ugly knows he’s beautiful even though everybody else doesn’t think he is,” said the 12-year-old who attends Stratford Middle School in San Jose.

To approach her acting for the role, she pretends to be an adult by tuning into the tender feelings of a mother.

“You have to act older than I am,” she said. “I think about my own mom and how she takes care of me — and that is basically how I create the character.”

Grotz recommends local families come to see “Honk!” because the show has a positive message for everyone.

“It’s OK to be different and if you are different then it’s like something you can be proud of and not be embarrassed about it.”

Matthew Horta plays two roles, “Jay Bird” and “Turkey.” The 10-year-old attends El Roble Elementary and can’t wait to perform the starring role of “Ralphie” in SVCT’s version of “A Christmas Story” during the upcoming holidays.

Jay Bird is an in-your-face TV news reporter who informs Ida that Ugly is missing as he interviews her for the story, he said. Turkey is one of the farm animals who acts “goofy” and provides comedy in the show. Getting into the costumes helps Horta in getting into the characters he portrays, he said. Also helping is memorizing his lines, which comes easy to him.

“When I first get the script I read the lines and I close my eyes and try to remember it,” he said. “My dad asks me: ‘How do you learn lines so quickly?’”

With five of her six children (ages 4 to 12) in the show, Jenn Oliphant as the assistant producer says “Honk!” is a family affair, especially with her mother-in-law as the vocal director recommending they audition.

“The kids are really excited,” she said. “They love to sing and dance and act and this was a great way to reach out into the community — and so we said, ‘Let’s go for it!’”

Oliphant encourages South Valley residents to see the show because of its high “cuteness” factor of children performing on the stage.

“This is a great chance to support the kids getting involved in the arts and their love and their pursuit of music and theater and acting,” she said. “I really feel like kids being involved in theater teaches them empathy, teaches them to interact with their world and their community and it’s a great way to participate.”

The rest of the cast is made up of Alexis Hsu as Fluff (Duckling), Goose, Froglet, Alice Ball as Bullfrog, Poultry, Goose, Ava Meehan as Greylag, Poultry, Frog, Brenden Oliphant as “Drake,” Cady Oliphant as Billy (Duckling), Snowy (Gooselet), Froglet, Claire Oliphant as Grace, Dot (Goose), Frog, Gabby Oliphant as “Maureen,” Camera Crew, Goose, Genie Oliphant as Beaky (Duckling), Barnacles (Goose), Froglet, Grace Butler Penny, Poultry, Blizzard Female Solo, Izzy Oliphant as Duckling, Goose, Froglet, Jace Puente as Downy (Duckling), Pinkfoot (Goose), Froglet, Julia Tracy as Henrietta, Swans, Camera Crew, and Liam Grotz as Poultry, Camera Crew, Goose, Frog.

The rest of the crew are producer Marianne Snook, choreographer Christine Carrillo, costumer Lorraine Bell, sound & lighting designer Spencer Oliphant and prop manager Lorraine Bell.