

## So much drama: Locals take on ‘High School Musical’

By Karen Billing  
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People looking for a traditional kiddie theater company should bypass the Actors Conservatory Theatre (ACT) completely. This youth theater company is scarily professional and is putting on one high quality and fun production of “High School Musical” at downtown’s Lyceum Theater through Aug. 31.

While the cast of 72 draws from all over San Diego, Carmel Valley has the largest representation with 16 talented youngsters, including Matt Maretz in the lead role as jock Troy. A junior at Canyon Crest Academy, Maretz won a National Youth Theatre Award in June for his role as Radames in the J Company’s “Aida.” Additionally, Carmel Valley’s own Chase Morrin, also a Canyon Crest student, plays the piano for the show in the accompanying three-piece band.

Representing Carmel Valley on stage are Kalaina Anderes, Carolyn Chu, India Glazer, Geertje Grootenhuis, Angela Han, Alyssa Harry, Andrea Liu, Madison Lombard, Brynn Maisel, Alexandra Nassar, Carla Nava, Mariangela Nava, Malone Peed, Jennifer Serwin and Julia Vanderwiel.

The play also features four actors from Solana Beach: Marissa Lebert, Mason Mercer, Torrey Mercer (who is outstanding as the snobby Sharpay) and Alyson Tharp; and two from Rancho Santa Fe, Kyra Heenan and Sarah Nicita.

If there’s a “tween” living in the household, it’s likely the Disney Channel’s version of “High School Musical” has been viewed more than a few times. The made-for-TV movie skyrocketed to popularity and spawned two sequels, one coming out on the big screen in the fall. The show centers on basketball star Troy and brainy Gabriella, who had a chance meeting over winter break and bonded over their secret love of signing. Kind of like in “Grease,” Gabriella shows up at Troy’s high school in time for clash between brains, jocks, cheerleaders and drama queens over roles in the school play.

“I think it’s really relatable,” said Carmel Valley’s Brynn Maisel, a sophomore at La Jolla Country Day. “Everyone can relate to a specific character.”

Maisel plays up in age, taking on the role of chemistry teacher Miss Tenny. She also plays various other company roles, totaling six costume changes in the first act alone.

While this is Maisel’s 14<sup>th</sup> time acting in a local production, she says working with ACT is an experience unlike the others.

“ACT San Diego has a level of professionalism to it so that if you want to move on you are definitely prepared for what’s to come,” Maisel said.

Leigh Scarritt, a professional actor who has performed in shows with the Starlight and Diversionary theater companies, serves as the no-nonsense director on the show. She



may call the young actors every kind of pet name in the book — honey, darlin’, sweetie, pumpkins, my loves and my angels are a few that came up in rehearsal last Tuesday night — but this director commands a professional level of respect and accountability from her charges. When told of a blocking change or acting suggestion, all of the youngsters reply with either “Thank you, Miss. Leigh” or “Yes, Miss. Leigh.”

Carmel Valley’s Alexandra Nassar, who is also a voice student of Scarritt’s said that kind of leadership pushes them to be the best.

“You have to put in 110 percent because she expects it out of you,” said Nassar. “It’s great because she knows what you are capable of.”

Maretz, who also studies voice with Scarritt, said while other youth directors may let things slide, she won’t tolerate it.

“It’s good to have a director that’s so on top of things,” Maretz said.

In between her instructions about how to keep their “eyes electric” or how to milk a line for maximum laughs, she is giving the actors pointers that they can use beyond the stage.

“If you can’t get there, don’t elbow your way there, that’s something you can use your entire career,” was one Scarritt gem after cheerleaders accidentally mashed together on stage trying to find their mark.

### **Locals take center stage**

Sisters Carla and Mariangela Nava, who attend Carmel Valley Middle and Sycamore Ridge respectively, were acting in their first ever show.

ACT San Diego presents “High School Musical” at the Lyceum Theatre  
Aug. 29 at 7 p.m.  
Aug. 30 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.  
Aug. 31 at 2 p.m.  
Tickets are \$18-21 adults, \$15-\$18 seniors and military, \$12-\$15 youth 17 and under.  
Tickets can be purchased online at [actsandiego.com](http://actsandiego.com) or by calling (619) 544-1000.  
The Lyceum is located at 79 Horton Plaza.

“It’s very exciting, very new to me,” said Carla. “I’ve never been on an actual stage before, it’s kind of creepy and kind of hard.”

Mariangela, a third grader, is performing in the show with her best friend Kalaina Anderes. Anderes estimates she’s seen the Disney version “millions of times” and said being in the show with her best buddy was what made the experience “a blast.”

Madison Lombard, a sixth grader at Solana Pacific, was also having a blast in her first time in a musical.

“I prefer musicals because I love to sing,” said Lombard. “I’ve been singing ever since I could talk my mom said.”

While she had the singing down, it was her first experience with dancing, which took a little more work.

Canyon Crest Academy sent many actors to ACT this summer including incoming freshman Alyssa Harry who plays a cheerleader and Geertje Grootenhuis who plays a basketball player.

“It’s a rush,” said Grootenhuis of performing on the Lyceum stage.

Nassar, who will be a junior at Canyon Crest, is looking forward to performing this show for audiences.

“It’s going to be amazing, my best friends are doing this show with me,” Nassar said. “I’m really proud of everyone.”