

# Theater, Art & Music



## Spring Awakening Debuts and takes Sacramento By Storm

By Jennifer Benton  
Staff Writer

Based on Frank Wedekind's first full length play, *Spring Awakening* features an original, surprisingly modern score by Duncan Sheik who employs alternative rock as part of the folk-infused rock score. It not only brings the story to life but pierces your soul and stirs emotions that many try to keep well hidden. Books and lyrics by Steven Sater, direction by Michael Mayer and choreography by the award-winning Bill T. Jones, this production was sure to be a hit from its inception.

Written in 1891, *Spring Awakening* (Fruhlings Erwachen) was Wedekind's first major play. Although written some 15 years prior, the play's first performance did not debut until November 20, 1906 at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin under the direction of Max Reinhardt. The homoeroticism, (implied) masturbation, suicide,

references to abortion, bondage, child abuse, and critical perspective of the sexually oppressive German culture caused a scandal, and was originally banned, as it offered a vivid dramatization of the erotic fantasies that such oppression breeds.

*Spring Awakening* first staged in English in 1917 in New York City and faced closure due to its pornographic nature. The New York City trial court issued an injunction to allow production to proceed. In 1955 the play was produced by OFF-Broadway Productions at the Provincetown Playhouse and in 1963 was produced in England for the first time; however, the show only ran two nights and in its censored form. Also produced in 1978 by Joseph Papp and directed by Livin Ciulei.

The musical adaptation came much later and after many rewrites over a 7 year period, *Spring Awakening* premiered

Off-Broadway at the Atlantic Theater Company on May 19, 2006 and ran through August 17, 2006; by December, the musical was not only on Broadway, premiering at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, but the most talked about and one of the most outstanding musicals of all time, winning 8 of 11 Tony nominations including Best Musical, Best Director, Best Orchestration and Best Lighting Design. *Spring Awakening* closed on Broadway on January 18, 2009, after 888 performances (859 on Broadway, 29 previews).

Melchoir (Jake Epstein, graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, whose television credits include "The Zack Files" and "Degrassi" has been on stage in numerous performances including *Sees God*, *Cinderella*, *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Our Town*, and Cameron MacKintosh's *Oliver!*), a willful and stubborn atheist, knows more about sex than the others because of what he reads in books and his mother's more liberal perspectives, is eager to share his knowledge through manuscript and demonstration.

This "sharing" results in the suicide of his insecure best friend, Moritz (Taylor Trench whose credits include *The Rocky Horror Show* (Frank 'N' Furter), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Seymour) and *Rabbit Hole* (Jason)) who blames his failure in school on his haunting, sexual dreams and to the death of Wendla (Christy Altomare, regional credits to include *Little Women*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, and *The Last Five Years*, is a graduate of Cincinbati College-Conservatory of Music-2008), Melchoir's childhood friend who falls for him, ends up pregnant with no real knowledge of how this happens and dies undergoing an abortion; her mother's attempt to save her.

Ilse (Steffi D, a top finalist on "Canadian Idol" 2006) is a girl who runs away from her abusive home to join the bohemians and Hanschen (Andy Mientus, is a senior in Musical Theater at the University of Michigan) and Ernst (Ben Fankhauser, made his professional debut with this company and is currently pursuing his B.F.A. from Ithaca College) explore their shameful interest in homosexuality.

The cast delivered a ground breaking performance which kept audiences unable to look away even in the most uncomfortable of moments. The vocal range of the performers was quite astonishing and seemingly limitless. This fresh, flawless performance and new, alternative rock score will be sure to bring a whole new generation of audiences flocking to the theater for years to come.

Provocative and unforgettable, *Spring Awakening*,

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## Ovations Performances for Calaveras this Winter

Five performances plus a Prelude holiday *Nutcracker* dance performance will be featured this winter in the 'Ovations' Performing Arts Series of the Calaveras County Arts Council. For 29 years the non-profit arts agency has been presenting a variety of high quality concerts to the rural residents of the Gold Country. All of the performances will be in Angels Camp at the Bret Harte Theatre, also known as the Dr. Elliott Smart Performing Arts Center, at 323 Highway 49. Season tickets for all six concerts are available now at \$120; Arts Council members are \$105.

Single tickets go on sale November 26. *The Nutcracker* costs \$15 per adult; youth to 18 cost \$7. All other Ovations tickets are \$25 per adult; \$10 for youth to 18. Buy them online at [www.highsierratickets.com](http://www.highsierratickets.com). For more information about Ovations, call the Calaveras County Arts Council at (209)754-1774 or visit [www.calaverasarts.org](http://www.calaverasarts.org). A full length, professional quality production of *The Nutcracker Ballet* will be performed by Studio 4 Dance Theatre of Murphys. Professional ballerina and dance instructor Tammie Lee brings to the stage dozens of local young dancers. Dazzling costumes and sets will further enthrall families with this enchanting holiday classic. *Prelude to the Season - The Nutcracker*, Friday, Dec 18 at 6:00 pm; Saturday, Dec 19 at 1:00 and 6:00 pm. Ovations' schedule at [www.calaverasarts.org](http://www.calaverasarts.org)



What a wonderful family tradition it is to usher in the holidays with *The Nutcracker Ballet* presented by Studio 4 Dance Theater of Murphys. Courtesy Photo to the Gold Country Times

## Warren Hill and Jesse Cook

By Sandy Carriger  
Staff Writer

Friday, October 9, 2009 was a beautiful evening to attend a concert at the Radisson Hotel Sacramento in the Guzzetta Grove. The comfortably cool night was perfect for a spectacular performance by two fantastic jazz musicians from Canada, Warren Hill and Jesse Cook. The Grove, for those of you who have never attended, is an outdoor seating venue of folding chairs set among a small grove of trees and shrubs smack dab in the middle of the hotel grounds. The stage is shielded by a half dome-shaped tent while colored lights set the ambiance. Huge speakers are on either side of the stage and the sound equipment engineer sits with all his controls and dials to stage right. Refreshments are offered at the bar for purchase, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. A few local vendors with booths along the perimeter pass out samples of assorted wares. Performing artists sell their recordings and sign autographs after the concert.



Jesse Cook (center) in concert at the Guzzetta Grove, Radisson Hotel, Sacramento, CA. Photo by Sandy Carriger

The show opened with contemporary jazz saxophonist, Warren Hill and his exemplary band; James Burt (keyboards), Vernon Barbary (bass), Wayne Gerard (guitar) and Third Richardson (drums).

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