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THEATER REVIEW: 'PUMP BOYS AND DINETTES'

Wise cracks and hot licks make for super show

Camelot Theatre cast twangs out nearly 20 songs



Q Zoom

The cast of 'Pump Boys and Dinettes' inhabit a world populated with gas pumps, linoleum countertops and an accordion. COURTESY PHOTO

By Roberta Kent
For the Daily Tidings
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"Pump Boys and Dinettes," the crowd-pleasing musical that opened Friday at Camelot Theatre Company, delivers a high-energy evening of just plain old country-western fun.

"Pump Boys and Dinettes" is a rollicking revue built loosely around the day-to-day lives of a group of five good ol' boys (Jim, L.M., Jackson, Eddie and Steve) who run a rural gas station and garage, and two wise-cracking sisters (Prudie and Rhettta Cupp) who run the Double Cupp Diner across the highway. "Pump Boys and Dinettes" serves up lots of high-octane country music seasoned with a bit of blues and honky-tonk, topped off with a touch of gospel beat.

Camelot's production showcases seven incredibly gifted actors and musicians.

Tyler Ward, as "Jim," leads the group with rhythm guitar. Karl Iverson, as "L.M.," plays keyboard and, yes, accordion — lots of accordion. Bob Jackson Miner, as "Jackson," plays lead guitar and a mean harmonica. Peter Spring, as "Eddie," plays bass. And Steve Sutfin, as "Steve," backs up the group on percussion — with all the guys pitching in on vocals.

The sisters, Kendra Taylor as "Prudie" and Sarah Brizek as "Rhettta," have great voices and join the band with washboard and tambourine.

Camelot Artistic Director Livia Genise directs, with choreography by Holly Nienhaus and music direction by Iverson.

"Pump Boys and Dinettes" has nearly 20 songs, everything from jammin' rockabilly, evoking the piano-pounding sound of Jerry Lee Lewis, rousing gospel ("I Need a Vacation"), the plaintive wail and bluesy growl of Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette ("The Best Man I Never Had," "Be Good or Be Gone") and the Caribbean-flavored country of Jimmy Buffet ("No Holds Barred").

There is a sweetly sentimental remembrance of a deceased grandmother ("Mamaw"), a fervent

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prayer for early morning fishing ("Fisherman's Prayer") and a bouncing ode to catfish ("Catfish"), complete with a goofy video projection.

The chatter between songs is mostly from Ward, with a bit of romantic byplay with Brizek and sardonic commentary from Taylor. Iverson has a delightful star turn on "The Night Dolly Parton was Almost Mine," Spring is sly on the innuendo-laden "Serve Yourself" and Sutfin gets to strut his stuff with "Farmer Tan" ("Brown arms, white chest and red neck").

There is even a bit of audience participation, with a lovely waltz offered by Taylor and a post-intermission raffle of a pine-scented car air-freshener by Ward.

The effective split-down-the-middle-by-Route-57 set by Don Zastoupil features a real "garage band" on one side and an authentic, Formica and round-stooled diner on the other. Brian O'Connor provided the accompanying video projections — everything from that dancing catfish to photos of the two "sisters" as children.

"Pump Boys & Dinettes," with book, music and lyrics by John Foley, Mark Hardwick, Debra Monk, Cass Morgan, John Schimmel and Jim Wann, originally opened at New York's Chelsea West Side Arts Theatre in 1981, moved to the Colonnades Theatre in Greenwich Village later that year and then to Broadway in February 1982. It earned both a Tony Award and a Drama Desk nomination for "Best Musical." The show has played all over the world and was just revived off-Broadway this past July.

Locally, the Oregon Cabaret Theatre did productions in 1989 and 1999.

"Pump Boys & Dinettes" at Camelot Theatre at the corner of Talent Avenue and Main Street in Talent runs through Sept. 21. Tickets can be purchased in person at the box office Monday through Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. and one hour before performances, by phone at 541-535-5250 or online at www.CamelotTheatre.org.

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