

ARTS COMMENTARY

Whores galore at Broadway Palm



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How do you celebrate your sweet 16th?

If you're the Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre, you celebrate with singing and dancing whores; the venue is kicking off its "Sweet 16th Season" with a revival of "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas."

The musical pokes fun at crusading Christians and hypocritical politicians who join forces to close down a Texas whorehouse — a whorehouse, by the way, many of them have happily visited.

Even though the Tony award-winning musical is 30 years old, it's still timely, considering today's political climate (which includes the revelation of a lovechild fathered by a former presidential candidate and the teenage pregnancy of the unmarried daughter of a candidate who espouses abstinence-only sex education.)

Prior to the show's beginning, the whores circulate throughout the audience, chatting up everyone.

And the audience is warned: "If y'all came to see 'Little House on the Prairie,' you came to the wrong house!"

But if you're concerned about seeing a musical starring whores, you have no need to worry: these are genteel whores, charming and sweet; you get the feeling they want to invite you

into the parlor for a cup of tea rather than demand cash for an hour of sexual gymnastics.

The musical presents us with such broadly sketched characters that they're like cartoons; it's to the actors' credit that they breathe life into the people they portray.

Sheriff Ed Earl Dodd (Gary Kimble) and Miss Mona, the madam (Carolyn McPhee), anchor the show as the two leads; they're a couple, but Ed Earl is too dense to realize how much Mona loves him and how much he's in love.

Kimble plays the sheriff with a blustering machismo that's off the scale. He delivers his lines as if biting the heads off of rabbits, and his colorful Texas sayings had the audience laughing throughout the night. But the world's changing around him, and he's not sure he's thrilled about what he sees. He rails against television, and causes a flap by running televangelist Melvin P. Thorpe, out of town. Unfortunately, the cameras are rolling when he does so.

Kimble also shows great tenderness during his one solo, "Good Old Girl."

McPhee is sizzling sophistication, a woman surrounded by girls. McPhee imbues her character with grace, poise, and grit. And when she opens her mouth to sing, this actress can do no wrong. She manages to conduct herself with great dignity even when given a monstrosity of a costume in Act I — a blue gown whose skirt looks as if Big Bird was dipped in blue dye.

The girls provide plenty of eye candy for the audience, as do the studly Aggies — a local football team who visit the whorehouse. These buff, chiseled, muscular actors are fine specimens of manhood, and bring down the house with "The Aggie Song," which takes place in their locker room.

Paige Mattox plays Doatsey Mae, a local waitress with dreams and aspirations that haven't been realized, and Tracey Zimmerman provides humor as a backwards, innocent whore whose timid ways leads Mona to name her Shy. (Zimmerman, who just finished playing Kelsi at the Broadway Palm's "High School Musical," seems to have a knack for playing shy young girls who suddenly blossom.)

Jewel (Faith Boles), the maid at the whorehouse, has her turn in the spotlight with "24 Hours of Lovin'," in which she enumerates how she and her

man will spend her day off. The beginning of her solo was so hot it almost set the stage on fire, but Boles seemed to have some problems with pitch as the song progressed.

Two actors in the musical play dual roles. Dale Given, making his Broadway Palm debut, performs as the senator and as the small town's mayor. And much beloved local actor Dick Westlake portrays CJ Scruggs, and the Governor. As Scruggs, he's one of the town's eccentric characters, a worrywart in a three-piece plaid suit. And as Governor, he performs "The Sidestep," as he answers reporters' questions and deftly sidesteps them. Westlake performs a hysterical dance that includes Elvis-like hip swiveling.

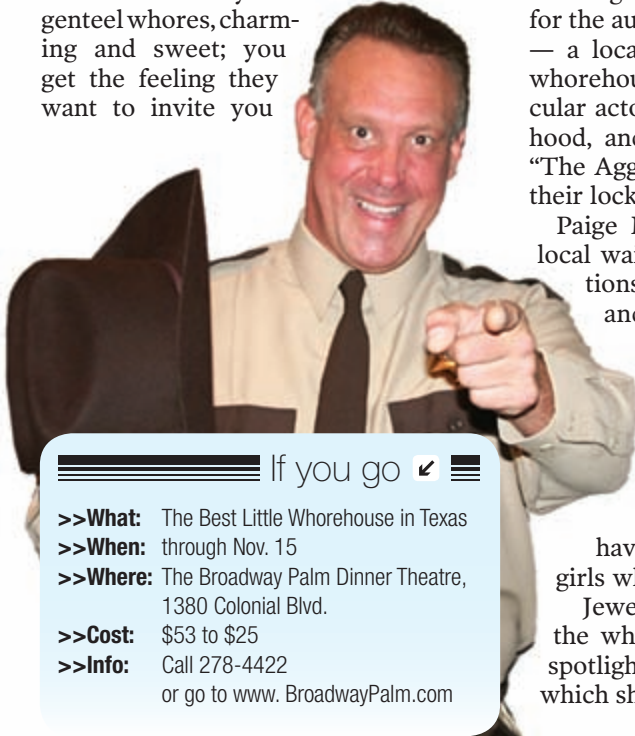
Choreographer Amy Marie McCleary (who also plays Ginger, one of the whores), has done a knockout job with the musical's dance sequences, especially Westlake's "Sidestep" and the Aggies' testosterone-drenched "Aggie Song."

The six-piece band, seated onstage throughout, provides the needed twang and accompaniment for this country-themed show.

And director Brian J. Enzman has pulled performances out of his actors that elevate this musical beyond itself. While "Best Little Whorehouse" can be cartoony and cute, lead actors such as Kimble as Sheriff, McPhee as Mona, and ensemble actors such as Westlake, Given and Mattox give it more depth and substance than you might expect. ■



"The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" is onstage through Nov. 15 at the Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre.



If you go

- >>What: The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas
- >>When: through Nov. 15
- >>Where: The Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre, 1380 Colonial Blvd.
- >>Cost: \$53 to \$25
- >>Info: Call 278-4422 or go to www.BroadwayPalm.com

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