

# BAY WEEKLY

## Patuxent Players' Trailer Park Musical Means Double Wide Grins

*This country -Western musical comedy delves beneath the surface of redneck stereotypes to find a hootin', hollerin' good time.*

REVIEWED BY JANE ELKIN

**S**ick over the end of summer fun? Calvert County's Patuxent Players have the cure for what ails you. *Lust 'n Rust: The Trailer Park Musical* will keep you laughing all the way through summer's last day, September 22.

The shared musical taste and vision of film writer Dave Stratton, director Frank Haney and producer Carol Kimball sparked this country-Western musical comedy. Featuring redneck stereotypes with everyday problems, this show opened to wide acclaim in Chicago six years ago but has seen little action since. So audiences will be starting a trend rather than following a long-outdated one.

Patuxent Players' small but talented troupe, founded in 1989, is used to breaking new ground. They have often produced relatively unknown shows, frequently changing venues as well. Their new semi-permanent home, the St. John Vianney Family Life Center in Prince Frederick, features a state-of-the-art auditorium that is more comfortable than most.

The play opens with Steve (Greg Rumpf), a corporate manager for Agribig food processing, singing about the open road as he drives his pick-up from New Jersey to southern Illinois, where he's been transferred. As he sings, video of kitschy sights of his roadtrip through the heartland is projected on a screen behind him. His destination is the Redbud Mobile Estates, a place so humble it proudly proclaims *Here at the Redbud, you won't be impressed. Mostly we sit back and chill. Here at the Redbud, you won't get depressed. Play tunes and fire up the grill.*

Besides grilling and chilling, sex is the favorite pastime of the locals, so the script reads a bit like a soap opera. Steve's involvement with a goodhearted waitress, Connie (Geri Reynolds), puts him at odds with Duane (Josh Smalls), Connie's charming opportunist of an estranged husband.

Duane suspects Steve's presence is temporary and a bad omen. Is he right?

Tanya (Lisa Sciannella) and Junior (Mike Harrenton) are stuck in a matrimonial rut, so she makes out with Junior's best friend Buzz (Jack Reynolds) to ease the boredom. Rationalizing that, "Things ain't always black and white," her conscience is at ease. But Buzz is cracking under the pressure. Will he tell?

Park proprietor Red (Montario Hill) is hot for Janette (Elizabeth Lang), who has twins named Billy and Willy. The "Caucasian hair" beautician, Latisha (Dionne Gause), keeps them all lookin' good while bringing Cajun spice to the mashed-potato prairie. Johnne Webster rounds out the cast, playing the chorus.

Dialogue and lyrics are clever and melodies hummable, if not especially memorable, but the cast is stellar.

Reynolds and Harrenton are perfect as middle-aged high school buds who never grew up but only out. Buzz is adorable in his simple naivete. Reynolds, who acts that role as well as being director of the show, a commendably balances both jobs.

Rumpf, however, seems miscast as leading man. He has a pleasant voice and demeanor, but he just seems too old and tired to be an up and coming executive and romantic lead opposite Reynolds' exuberant Connie.

Dialogue dragged on opening night, but the pace suffered most from song formatting. It is surprising that an experienced group of musical theater performers has not adopted the common practice of speaking dialogue during the eight-measure musical introduction.

All in all, though, this escapist comedy will make you laugh out loud and renew your faith in humanity. You'll enjoy getting to know these characters and seeing how the dust of Steve's impact settles on this small, close-knit community.

*Directed by Jack Reynolds. Set: Dave Hoffman and Jack Reynolds. Costumes: Millie Coryer-Dhu. Lights: Cindy Brown.*

*Playing thru Sept 22 at 8PM FSA; 2PM & 8PM Sept. 22 @ St. John Vianney Family Life Center Theater, 105 Vianney Ln., Prince Frederick. \$15: 410-326-1401; www.patuxent-playhouse.com.*

