

Bonnie & Clyde – a new musical

Review

By Paul Wozniak, for Lansing City Pulse Newspaper

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Keeping Up With The Killers

Peppermint Creek sets the original celebrity criminals to music

As a biographical musical love story, “Bonnie and Clyde” offers reasonable retro entertainment. The music, written by Frank Wildhorn, ranges from early jazz and blues to show stopping, shout-and-response gospel, which the cast delivers with r e q u i s i t e polish. But for Peppermint Creek, “Bonnie and Clyde” feels a little tame; a gushy, generic celebration of populist celebrity criminals instead of its usual sharper edged fare.

Director Katie Doyle has the good fortune of working with some of the best of Lansing talent. Brittany Nicol (as Bonnie Parker) and Adam Woolsey (Clyde Barrow) honed their stage chemistry last season in Riverwalk Theatre’s “Spring Awakening.” Once again, Woolsey’s piercing eyes and agile singing complete his bad boy character, the kind that Nicol’s naïve Parker simply can’t resist.

Unlike “Spring Awakening,” however, “Bonnie and Clyde” sets up a classic love triangle with Ted Hinton (Scott Laban) a police officer who carries a torch for Bonnie. Ted knows how bad Clyde is for Bonnie, but he never really has a shot himself.

But while Ted is almost invisible to Bonnie, Laban shines as a supporting actor; he exudes a quiet charm and competence, making the scene when Ted realizes he’s lost Bonnie to Clyde so heartbreaking.

Other notable supporting roles include Tigiste Habtemariam, wisely cast as the preacher; Bill Henson as Clyde’s father, Henry; and Mary Maurer as Clyde’s sister-in-law Blanche. The production reaches its energetic peak toward the end of the first act with Habtemariam’s foot-stomping “God’s Arms Are Always Open.” Additionally, Woolsey and Laban share two exceptional duets in the first and second acts.

Technical elements like music and set design are the best of any Peppermint Creek production. Music director Brent Decker keeps the songs moving with his tight orchestra smartly tucked next to the audience seating and Jeff Boerger’s scenic design offering beautiful layers with minimal set moving. Especially nice touches include upside-down flower planters as vintage salon hair dryers.

The sound, however, was a constant distraction. Actors’ voices suddenly streamed through the stage speakers during musical numbers and quieted after, but not always, when the singing started. Some supporting actors are left stranded without any amplification that disturbed the balance between the singers and the orchestra.

Ultimately, it’s the script itself that leaves the actors stranded. A bloated run time and thin character development unfortunately make Bonnie and Clyde out to be the criminal Kardashians of their time. But a strongly committed cast and crew keep “Bonnie and Clyde” from driving off the road and the audience from feeling robbed.