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Curtain call: The ugly truth *'Dogfight' explore ugliness, inside and out*

by [Mary C. Cusack](#) for the Lansing City Pulse

Peppermint Creek's latest production, "Dogfight," is a play about unattractive women and crass human behavior, set against the backdrop of a violent global conflict on the eve of a presidential assassination. Yet despite — or perhaps in spite of — all of that ugliness, it is an entertaining and beautiful masterpiece of love and compassion.

The musical is a 2013 adaptation of the 1991 movie about a group of U.S. Marines who, on the eve of their departure for Vietnam, arrange a "dogfight" contest. The jackpot goes to the jarhead who brings the ugliest girl to a party, while hiding that goal from their unsuspecting dates. The script is faithful to the film, and the addition of the musical numbers links the story more closely to the turbulent period of the late 1960s.

Buddies Eddie (Patrick Harney), Boland (Matthew Bill) and Bernstein (Joe Quick) hit the streets of San Francisco to find prizewinning bow-wows. Eddie is about to give up when he meets Rose (Jayna Katz), a mousy waitress and aspiring folk singer. He turns on his magnetic charm and convinces the dubious girl to accompany him.

Rose is no competition compared to Boland's date, Marcy. Amanda Harvey plays the toothless hooker with panache, portraying a woman who turns winning a loser's game into a personal triumph.

Eddie and his buddies are young, dumb and full of cockiness, but are taken down a peg when Rose lashes back at the men's cruelty. Shaken by her reminder of their mortality, Eddie struggles to sort out his very complex feelings. He follows Rose home and spends the rest of the evening trying to make a real connection with her. Their mutual awkwardness is deeply touching, as they forge a bond that may or may not hold when Eddie heads off to war.

Harney is perfect in the role. Resembling a young Leonardo DiCaprio, he is handsome and charismatic, yet also imbues Eddie with a conflicted, thoughtful quality. He is the kind of guy that an average girl like Rose would dream about, but never think she could attain.

Like Boland bringing in a ringer to win the contest, director Badgero has brought in his own ringer to win the audience. Even when frumped up a bit, Katz shines as she channels Rose's awkward innocence. And when she sings, Rose is the most beautiful girl in the world.

Badgero maximizes the minimal space of Peppermint Creek's venue. Through an amazingly coordinated effort by Badgero, scenic designer Jeff Boerger and music director Edric Haleen, the stage accommodates a six-person orchestra, a two-story recreation of the Golden Gate Bridge and at times a full-size bed, and still allows choreographer Karyn Perry adequate space to design full dance sequences featuring up to a dozen characters.

As big as the production can seem, the intimate space becomes the perfect backdrop to experience the intense moments of trust being built and broken. Facades are stripped away, and insecurities are exposed. The changing of clothes symbolizes changing attitudes, and in the close atmosphere of the venue, these moments of change are achingly raw and touching.

"Dogfight"

8 p.m. Thursday, March 26, Friday, March 27 & Saturday, March 28; 2 p.m. Sunday, March 29 \$20/\$15 students and seniors Peppermint Creek Theatre 6025 Curry Lane, Lansing (517) 372-0945 peppermintcreek.org

