

Injustice league

Tragedy and musical collide in Peppermint Creek's 'Parade'

by [Paul Wozniak](#)

Wednesday, November 12, 2014, Lansing City Pulse



They say the suit makes the man. Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.'s latest production, "Parade," tweaks that concept as "the music makes the show." It's a testament to director Jane Falion and her cast's dedication that the story and characters resonate for the audience as much as composer/lyricist Jason Robert Brown's beautifully complex, multi-genre score does.

On paper, "Parade" is a sure-fire hit: A historic drama based on a real event with relevant themes for any time. It's 1913 in Georgia and Leo Frank (Adam Woolsey), a Brooklynborn Jew transplanted to the Deep South, is wrongly accused and convicted for raping and murdering a 13-year-old girl. After the governor commutes his sentence, a racist mob lynches Frank anyway. At its core, "Parade" is a tragic, true-life parable about prejudice and failed justice around a

hap less everyman. However, Alfred Uhry's book only seems interested in Frank as a broad symbol for anti-Semitism.

Woolsey brings a blend of charisma and earnestness to Frank that humanizes his character.

Essentially he's a big-city elitist in a small town experiencing extreme culture shock. Woolsey shares authentic chemistry with Mary Maurer, who plays his wife, Lucille; she is primarily a background character in the first half, but drives the plot in Act II.

Joseph Baumann plays the unscrupulous Hugh Dorsey, the district attorney set on convicting Frank despite lack of real evidence. Dorsey is the most detailed character onstage, a man working under pressure from the governor and a zealous preacher to bring "swift justice" to an unwitting suspect. Fortunately, Baumann refrains from turning Dorsey into a mustache-twirling caricature and, instead, adds real subtlety and nuance to a man who realizes too late that he's sold his soul for political prominence.

The rest of the cast members have brief moments to shine, and excel especially in the opening number "Old Red Hills of Home." It's an eerie yet powerful ballad about the townsfolk who romanticize their past. With sparse dialogue, "Parade" moves more like an Americana operetta, seamlessly blending songs that dabble in a variety of musical genres from jazz and ragtime to gospel spirituals.

Music director Seth Burk and his compact orchestra are perhaps the real stars of the show. The arrangements are not easy, and less experienced musicians could stumble over the constant shifts in time, tempo and style. But Burk's direction keeps the music rock solid.

"Parade" clocks in at two-and-a-half hours, which is reasonable for a plot heavy epic drama. But without more emotionally relatable characters, "Parade" often dissolves into a stale, civics lesson about terrible things that happened in the past.

"Parade"

Peppermint Creek Theatre Co. 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 13-Saturday, Nov. 15; 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 16 \$18/\$15 students and seniors Miller Performing Arts Center 6026 Curry Lane, Lansing (517) 927-3016, peppermintcreek.org