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ONSTAGE



'Always' and forever

By M. Eileen Brown

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There are three main characters in "Always ... Patsy Cline." There's Patsy, of course, and Louise Seger, her devoted fan and narrator of this story. Finally, there's the music.

Written and originally directed by Ted Swindley, this jukebox musical originally hit the stage in 1988. It's a showcase for Patsy's music — something some of the early reviewers seemed to resent. It recounts the story of a fan who met the country star at a honky-tonk before a performance in Houston in 1961. The two hit it off and remained pen pals until Patsy's death in a plane crash at age 30.

The name of the play comes from the sign-off the star used at the end of each letter to her friend.

You won't find any outrageous theatricality in this revival at Pheasant Run Mainstage. No Lady Gaga meat dresses. No pyrotechnic bustiers. Just music from a singer who simply stood there dressed like she wanted to fit in rather than offend while she shared the most intimate moments of her life. She

Music takes center stage in Fox Valley's 'Patsy Cline'

"Always ... Patsy Cline"

★ ★ ★

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Country music star Patsy Cline (Megan Long) belts out a song in Fox Valley Repertory's production of "Always ... Patsy Cline."

THE 3

Here's to dads

Four funny fathers team up for "Stand-Up Dads," a show that details the joys of suburban fatherhood. Comedians Dan St. Paul, Tim Bedore, Milt Able and Kelly McDonald star in the show running at Aurora's Paramount Theater. Suitable for teens and older.

8 p.m. Friday, April 8, at 23 E. Galena Blvd., Aurora. (630) 896-6666 or paramountaurora.com.

'Anne Frank' on stage

The Metropolis Performing Arts Centre commemorates April's Holocaust Remembrance Day with a remount of "The Diary of Anne Frank." Brian Rabinowitz directs the play — part of the theater's Stories in Action! series for young audiences — which recounts a young girl's experience hiding from the Nazis with her family during World War II. Elaine Ivy Harris stars as Anne, with Marshall Stern as Mr. Frank.

Performances begin Monday, April 11, at 111 W. Campbell St., Arlington Heights. (847) 577-2121 or metropolisarts.com.

Stop the presses

TimeLine Theatre Company revives "The Front Page," the classic comedy by journalists-turned-playwrights Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur in which political corruption and no-holds-barred journalism collide on the eve of an execution presided over by a dubious group of officials and reported by a zealous group of scribes. Nick Bowling directs the show, which stars PJ Powers and Terry Hamilton as ace reporter Hildy Johnson and his determined editor, Walter Burns.

Previews begin Tuesday, April 12, at 615 W. Wellington Ave., Chicago. The show opens Saturday, April 16. (773) 281-8463, ext. 6, or timelinetheatre.com.

— Barbara Vitello

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—*Chicago Tribune*



"Exemplary ensemble work... the acting delivers stirring emotional turns."—*Newcity*

"The intimacy and richly textured acting by this committed cast makes for a wonderful theatrical event."—*Chicago Critic*



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—*Chicago Sun-Times*

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sings her heart out as if that should be enough. For her and for you.

In those days, the music was everything.

Megan Long plays Patsy in the Fox Valley Repertory (formerly Noble Fool Theatricals) production of "Always ... Patsy Cline." She does it with sultry understatement. At first, it's hard to get used to her paucity of movement. You wait for her to grandly gesture or prance across the stage while she cautiously, even tenderly, clings to her microphone, as did Patsy. As she draws you in with her eyes, as did Patsy, her subtle gestures re-create and transform Patsy before your eyes. Meanwhile, her rich, emotionally charged vocals show you why Patsy Cline remains a favorite among fans almost 50 years after her death.

Kate Brown plays Louise Seger — the cheeky, good ole gal who can't believe her good fortune in meeting and befriending her country idol. Brown's balanced performance provides just the right touch of folksy sincerity and comic charm. Her monologues carry the story along by embedding each of Patsy's songs into the circumstances of her life at a given time.

The backup band here is a musical trio featuring Mark Braun on guitar, Phil Martin on drums and Daniela Bisenius on fiddle. They almost steal the show with their energetic rhythms and melodies. Their authentic country sound is something you might not expect if you only knew the details of their musical backgrounds — see the program for an entertaining surprise.

"Always ... Patsy Cline" could easily turn into a schmaltzy, overdone, Oprahesque adversity story: The little girl from the country gets famous and lives a tough life and is worshipped by her fans and dies an untimely death after giving us some tremendous music. At one level, this is what the story is. Told

Location: Fox Valley Repertory, Pheasant Run Resort Mainstage, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles, (630) 584-6342, foxvalleyrep.org

Showtimes: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays through May 15. Also 2 p.m. Thursday, April 7 and 21 and May 12

Running time: About two hours with intermission

Tickets: \$29-\$39; dinner packages start at \$49

Parking: Free lot

Rating: For all ages

from the worshipful view of a devoted fan, the script is a sanitized and one-dimensional view of the gutsy singer's tumultuous life.

Under the direction of John Gawlik, the performance is more nuanced. The players communicate a tentative uncertainty about their representations of the events they recount, as if they were not sure that their memories were accurate or that the story they told was the whole story. (Indeed, darker versions of the story do exist. Check out Jessica Lange in "Sweet Dreams.") You leave the theater understanding that both women know that their relationship was very important to them at the time it existed, but only the backup band with its adept musicality has certainty about how things are really going.

Ultimately, plot really is beside the point here. The play is all about the music.

The melodies that made Patsy an icon include "Crazy," "Walking After Midnight" and "I Fall to Pieces." If you are a die-hard Patsy fan, you will enjoy this re-creation of her performances at different phases of her career. If you are too young to know about Patsy, this is a great opportunity to learn about her.

Either way, you will leave the theater with tunes in your head and an eagerness to get to YouTube so you can check out the videos of her original performances.

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