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## Critic's Choice: Warming up to musical legend Patsy Cline

BY TOM WITOM - [thomaswitom@yahoo.com](mailto:thomaswitom@yahoo.com)  
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ST. CHARLES –The late country and pop singer Patsy Cline was one of a kind, a musical sensation whose memory is celebrated in a fast-paced musical by Ted Swindley based on a true story of the singer's friendship with a devoted fan.

The show, "Always ... Patsy Cline," which premiered in 1988, is now regaling audiences at Fox Valley Repertory in Pheasant Run under the direction of John Gawlik.

Megan Long, a strong actor who plays the legendary entertainer, gives an understated performance, taking her time to bring her character to life.

When she catches fire, Long's Patsy Cline is really hot. During the production's nearly two-hour span, audiences hear renditions of Patsy's greatest hits, including "Walkin' After Midnight" and such classics as "Crazy," "Sweet Dreams," "I Fall to Pieces" and "She's Got You."

Altogether some 25 songs are sung, covering everything from lost loves and broken hearts to innocent children and found love. It's all framed around punchy dialogue and easy, outgoing good humor led by Louise, who occasionally steals the show.

Set in 1957 in Houston, the story tells how Louise Seger, a flamboyant divorcee and country music devotee played by Kate Brown, takes advantage of an opportunity to meet Cline, who has come to town as part of a whirlwind concert tour.

That chance encounter leads to an instant bond between the two women. After her performance, Patsy accepts an invitation from Louise for a bite to eat and a place to crash overnight. The two subsequently struck up a correspondence that continued until the 30-year-old Grand Ole Opry legend's untimely death in a 1963 plane crash.

A small onstage band, introduced as the Bodacious Bobcats, provided musical support; members included Ken Jones, conductor/accompanist; Daniela Bisenius, fiddle; Mark Braun, steel guitar; and Phil Martin, drums.

Meanwhile, Patsy's numerous outfit changes showcased costume designer Kimberly G. Morris's keen eye.

### Tickets, please

**What:** "Always ... Patsy Cline"  
**Where:** Fox Valley Repertory at Pheasant Run, 4051 E. Main St., in St. Charles  
**When:** Through May 15  
**Tickets:** \$29 to \$39  
**Show information:** 630-584-6342

### Critic's Choice Extra: 'Tree' shakes out secrets

CHICAGO – Family secrets come out in a torrent during the Chicago premiere at Victory Gardens Theater of "Tree," Julie Hebert's stirring drama about two racially different families that have more in common than they realized. Hebert directs the taut 90-minute play.



Megan Long in the title role of "Always ... Patsy Cline" at Fox Valley Repertory. (Photo provided)  
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"What are your Easter plans?"

Didi (Elaine Rivkin), a gender studies teacher at Louisiana State University, discovers old letters her late father kept that hint at a past life that's a complete surprise to her. Curious, she travels to an address on Chicago's South Side, where she meets her black half-brother Leo (Aaron Todd Douglas), a man with whom she shared the same father.

She also meets Leo's aged mother Jessalyn Price (Celeste Williams), who drifts in and out of lucidity and occasionally spouts obscenities like someone afflicted with Tourette's syndrome.

For Leo, a cook at a barbecue restaurant, connecting with a white half-sister takes some getting used to – and he's resistant.

He never knew his biological father and clings to the memory of the late stepfather who helped raise him.

Details emerge about a passionate teenage love affair between Jessalyn and a white boy; neither family approved. The young man enlisted in the Marines and a pregnant Jessalyn moved north to an aunt's house, but the two kept up a correspondence and plans for the future.

Over the years, Jessalyn kept the secret of her early romance in her heart and a stash of letters locked up in a bank safe-deposit box.

A buoyant Leslie Ann Shaepppard appears late in the play as JJ, Leo's college-age daughter.

"Tree" will be performed through May 1 at Victory Gardens Theatre, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave., in Chicago. Tickets cost \$20 to \$50. Learn more at 773-871-3000 or visit [www.VictoryGardens.org](http://www.VictoryGardens.org).



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