



## Critical Evaluation



# Chicago Stage Style

April 2011 Review by Joe Stead

## Always...Patsy Cline



A simple bronze plaque at the grave of singer Patsy Cline reads: "Death cannot kill what never dies: Love". To think that this remarkable woman accomplished so much in her tragically short 30 years on Earth is a part of what keeps the legend of Patsy Cline alive half a century after her death in a private airplane crash in 1963. Patsy is not only considered the greatest female country singer of all time, but also one of the most distinctive voices of any musical genre. Having no prior interest or experience in country music myself, I began to do a bit of research on this woman who was so loved and respected, and I discovered not only an artist of incomparable depth and talent, but a genuinely kind and generous soul who exemplified love in everything she did.

Born Virginia Patterson Hensley in Winchester, Virginia (a town I visited frequently in my years on the East Coast), the singer we know as Patsy Cline was a real trailblazer. After her father deserted her family at the age of 15, Patsy dropped out of high school and began working odd jobs from waitress to soda jerker. Her natural God-given talent earned her some singing jobs as she worked her way up from bars and honky tonks to the Grand Ol' Opry. A serious childhood illness resulted in her deep, soulful contralto which was compared to Kate Smith but yet distinctly her own instrument. She may not have been able to read music to know the difference between an F and a C minor, but she had a natural ear for music and a talent for singing, piano playing and songwriting.

No less important to note was Patsy Cline's humanitarian qualities. In one of two near-death car accidents, she insisted that the driver of the other car be treated first. She was a friend and inspiration to up-and-coming country singers Loretta Lynn, Dottie West, Barbara Mandrell, Jan Howard and Brenda Lee, giving financial and personal support to all. She could be a shrewd business woman too, refusing to perform for rascally promoters who would promise to pay and then abscond with the money during a performance. Her demands were simple and up front: "No dough, no show". Her music and legacy crossed the lines from country to pop and left an enormous void with her untimely death, which she herself foresaw.



The musical "Always...Patsy Cline" had its World Premiere in 1988, and was taken and expanded from a section of the Cline biography "Honky Tonk Angel," which chronicled the late singer's meeting and friendship with a fan named Louise Seger. It is that relationship that is revived in the latest Fox Valley Repertory performance, and it is the music that Cline made famous that keeps this lively part concert, part narrative swinging. Cline was a powerhouse talent alright, and the attractive young Megan Long is not in her vocal league. Long offers a decent enough cover of 27 numbers in the Cline repertoire, although some of the lower notes are clearly out of her range. Nonetheless, it is an



My toast?  
Ruined in  
**30 SECONDS.**

affecting tribute, and Kate Brown is a sassy delight as her biggest cheerleader, Louise Steger. Patsy Cline was no easy act to replicate, but she would no doubt be proud of the effort made on her behalf.

## About Joe Stead



Joe Stead has enjoyed a lifelong passion for the theatre, which has involved acting, directing, producing, designing and reviewing since 1984. He served as founder, producer and Artistic Director of Curtain Up Productions in Baltimore, Maryland and Four Star Players in Tampa, Florida. Favorite productions have included "Life With Father," "Deathtrap," "The Odd Couple," "The Miracle Worker," "Brighton Beach Memoirs," "You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown" and "Godspell". He has also performed leading roles in "Fiddler on the Roof," "Pippin," "The Phantom of the Opera," "The Front Page," and most recently as Hucklebee in "The Fantasticks" for Waukegan Community Players. Joe holds a degree in Commercial Art from Tampa Technical Institute. As a critic, he has reviewed everything from Broadway to community theatre and major regional theatres throughout the United States including the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey, Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut, and the Asolo Theatre in Sarasota, Florida.

Since 1998, he has been a proud resident of Chicago, the greatest theatre city in America. He served for two years as Theatre Editor for College News and Central Newspapers. He created the website Steadstyle Chicago in 2000 to showcase the city's outstanding and diverse theatre scene. Joe was proud to serve alongside a distinguished panel of theatre professionals as a judge for two seasons of Speaking Ring Theatre's "Vitality" Festival of original short plays. His most fulfilling role, in addition to reviewer and all-around theatre fanatic, was as director of the 2007 production of Peter Shaffer's "Equus" at Actors Workshop (now Redtwist) Theatre, which was nominated for five Joseph Jefferson Award Citations and won for Best Actor (Peter Oyloe).

