

examiner.com

Performance Network reunites with David Wells for 'County Line' premiere



Photos by Sean Carter



Patty Nolan
Detroit Theater Examiner

Related Video:



Performance Network Theatre

'County Line' at Performance Network Theatre

Rating:

January 25, 2014

How does one recommend a drama about a subject that is unwieldy and unsettling? It's easy, when the play is David Wells' newest offering, which is enjoying its world premiere at Ann Arbor's **Performance Network Theatre**. "County Line" champions the difficult subject of teenagers trapped in bad foster home situations. Wells – teamed up again with PNT's Artistic Director, David Wolber – treats the issue with honesty, compassion and restraint while resisting the urge for bombast and browbeating.

View all
5 photos



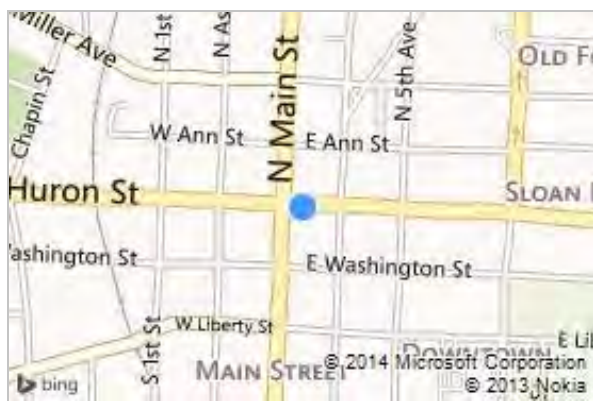
The perspective is largely that of 17-year-old Lois (Alissa Nordmoe), who is

Related Photo:



Photos by Sean Carter

Performance Network Theatre



120 E Huron St, Ann Arbor, MI

suddenly thrust into foster care when her screwball father (Phil Powers) screws up one time too many. The story unfolds in a two-steps-forward, one-step-back approach as 22-year old Lois tells us about life with her father and what happened to land her in foster care with Tanya (Julia Glander), the owner of the County Line truck stop, and a 17-year-old foster brother, Darius (Emilio Rodriguez).

For all its grim content, the script is actually funny – there are many, many laugh lines and just as many sweet (not saccharine) moments. Phil Powers is a hoot as Lois' beloved stoner dad, who wafts in and out of the narrative like the smell of pot at a Grateful Dead concert. Powers also plays all the other adult males in the show and manages to make each different without resorting to artificial affectations or ridiculous wardrobe changes.

Also charming are the characters of the two teenagers who, for all their hard knocks and street-smarts, are achingly naïve. Alissa Nordmoe's Lois is soft-spoken and seems almost apologetic about telling us her sad story. She is the quiet voice of reason and acceptance – or so it seems. Emilio Rodriguez, as Darius, deftly reveals the vulnerability behind his tough-guy stance. If his character is familiar, it is never clichéd.

That the two stranded teenagers awkwardly try to protect each other gives us faith in the resilience of the better human instincts. But even so, the story unfolds like a scary movie that has been stripped of its eerie sound track. There are no crashing, discordant chords to warn us that the monster is coming. And when the monster comes, it's too late to scream.

Julia Glander, as Tanya, gives us a finely drawn portrait of a woman who is all too experienced

at hiding her desperation. She is never funnier than when she is inventing her own Bible quotes to see if Lois can spot the ersatz scripture. And she is never more sinister than when she calmly paraphrases 1 Corinthians 10:13 – assuring Lois that she will be able to endure her trials.

This PNT production of “County Line,” directed by Artistic Director David Wolber, is lean and unpretentious – there is no sense of spectacle or big melodrama. The characters scarcely raise their voices. Even so, one can’t help feeling that this premiere is important. Maybe we shouldn’t be surprised. Last season’s PNT season brought the debut of Wells’ charming comedy, “**Brill**” and the U of M alumnus is clearly at the top his game. In fact, the script for “County Line” has already received critical acclaim as a 2013 National New Play Network Showcase Selection and as an Edgerton Award winner.

Wolber is supported by a solid production crew that includes: Assistant Director Sarab Kamoo, Dramaturg Carla Milarch, Scenic Designer Kirk Domer, Lighting Designer Mary Cole, Sound Designer Ed Weingart, Costume Designer Amber Marisa Cook, Props Designer Charles Sutherland, Stage Manager Liz Picurro, Assistant Stage Manager Eric Hohnke, and Technical Director Joshua M. Parker.

Take time to see “County Line.” And if you find that you want to do something about the problems it portrays, PNT has thoughtfully partnered with **Ozone House**, Washtenaw County’s crisis center serving runaway, homeless and high-risk youth. Call 734-662-2265 to learn how you can help.

“County Line” runs through February 16, 2014 with shows on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., and matinees on Saturdays at 3 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. Regular tickets cost \$22 - \$41 and can be purchased **online** or by calling the box office at 734-663-0681. Discounts are available for students, seniors, children under the age of 16 and members of the military.

As a special treat, **Everyday Wines** is hosting a pre-show wine tasting one hour before the curtain rises on the evenings of January 31 and February 6. The wine tasting will take place in the theatre lobby and the cost is only \$5 extra with a ticket purchase. Just select the sales promotion “Wine Tasting” when reserving tickets to be automatically signed up for the tasting and the performance. Patrons who have already purchased their tickets to “County Line” are

welcome to exchange or add on the wine tasting to an existing order.

Performance Network Theatre is located at 120 East Huron Street in Ann Arbor.

WHAT'S THIS?

9 Huge Celebrities Who Are Surprisingly Small [Celeb Zen](#)

5 Signs if Cancer is Activated in Your Body [NewsmaxHealth](#)

2014 Pin-Ups: The 5 Best-selling Calendars This Year [TheRichest](#)

Mutilated puppy recovering after someone cut off leg and ears [26 comments](#)

WWE rumors: CM Punk walks out on the WWE after the 'Royal Rumble' [1 comment](#)

Lunchtime blues: How to freshen, clean and scrub a thermos [1 comment](#)

Glens Falls man charged with animal cruelty for abandoning pets in unheated home

0 comments



Start the discussion...

Best ▾

Community

Share

Login ▾

Be the first to comment.

[Subscribe](#)

[Add Disqus to your site](#)