



# Performance Network's 'County Line' raises r questions than it answers



([http://ads.mlive.com/RealMedia/ad arbor/2014/01/performance\\_netwo](http://ads.mlive.com/RealMedia/ad arbor/2014/01/performance_netwo)

d=54012&bannerid=1932704&dis

Alissa Nordmoe stars in the world premiere production of David Wells' "County Line" at Performance Network. (Photo by Sean Carter)

Print ([http://blog.mlive.com/annarbornews\\_entertainment\\_impact/print.html?entry=2014/01/performance\\_networks\\_county\\_li.html](http://blog.mlive.com/annarbornews_entertainment_impact/print.html?entry=2014/01/performance_networks_county_li.html))



(<http://connect.mlive.com/user/jennmckee/index.html>) By Jenn McKee | [jennmckee@mlive.com](mailto:jennmckee@mlive.com)  
(<http://connect.mlive.com/user/jennmckee/posts.html>)

Follow on Twitter (<https://www.twitter.com/jennmckee>)

on January 25, 2014 at 4:05 AM, updated January 26, 2014 at 2:46 AM

([http://ads.mlive.com/RealMedia/ad arbor/2014/01/performance\\_networks\\_county\\_li.html?d=54012&bannerid=1932704&dis](http://ads.mlive.com/RealMedia/ad arbor/2014/01/performance_networks_county_li.html?d=54012&bannerid=1932704&dis))

You know that restless feeling you get when you add a bunch of numbers together, again and again, but the sum's just not coming out right?

That's what I felt while watching the world premiere production of David Wells' drama "County Line" at Performance Network

([http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/world\\_premiere\\_of\\_david\\_wells.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/world_premiere_of_david_wells.html)).

The play focuses on 17 year old Lois (Alissa Nordmoe), a good-hearted, quiet girl who lives in Kansas with her loving-but-irresponsible father (Phil Powers) until a costly mistake lands him in prison. Social services places Lois with foster mother Tanya (Julia Glander), who's also housing a teenage foster son, Darius (Emilio Rodriguez), while running a truck stop called The County Line.

Awkwardness and a sense of menace loom over the three; and when Tanya crosses a line with Lois, a series of events are set in motion.

The play often feels elusive because there are several gaps we're left to fill in on our own. At "County"'s start, Lois and her father seem to exist in a vacuum – we learn nothing of Lois' life outside of that house and that father-daughter relationship; so later in the play, when she's talking with Darius about having had a boyfriend (who met a tragic end), I assumed she was lying, and just trying to seem more worldly to her peer. But I'm not sure that's right.

And when Tanya commits the unforgivable, you wonder why she hadn't started down that particular path immediately upon Lois' arrival. The answer seems to be not that that's how it would likely happen in the world, but rather that that's how a play builds to its climax.

That's a problem, especially considering how toothless Tanya seems until that moment. Yes, Darius alludes to abuse a couple of times; but he's presented as an unreliable source early in the play; and what we see of Tanya, until this breaking point arrives, are images of an awkward, insecure, strict and lonely middle-aged woman.

So I was never sure what or whom to believe in "County Line"; and several disconnects and nagging, lingering questions I had – in addition to several long passages that felt self-consciously poetic – prevented me from ever emotionally investing, or fully believing, in its characters.

From a design standpoint, Mary Cole's lighting design helped mark the play's (occasionally clunky) shifts in time, since Lois appears at age 17 and age 23; Kirk Domer's scenic design, which depicts a house interior, furnished with Charles Sutherland's props, is versatile enough to represent the play's various locales, with an assist from Cole; and Amber Marissa Cook designed costumes, while Ed Weingart designed the show's sound.

Director David Wolber and his able cast are clearly committed to "County," but the overall tone feels skewed. For Wolber clearly wants to highlight the play's moments of lightness and levity, but he may have done so at the expense of the dark tones necessary to give the story a sense of heft and urgency.

## Michigan's Be



(<http://topics.mlive.com/tag/michigan-best/posts.html>)

**Follow our quests to find out what Michigan's best our state has to offer. (http://topics.mlive.com/tag/michigan-best/posts.html#incredible-report)**

Michigan's Best Pizza  
(<http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/michigans-best-pizza.html>)

Michigan's Best Brewery  
(<http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/michigans-best-brewery.html>)

Michigan's Best Burger  
(<http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/michigans-best-burger.html>)

Michigan's Best Breakfast  
(<http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/michigans-best-breakfast.html>)

Michigan's Best Ice Cream  
(<http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/michigans-best-ice-cream.html>)

[View all coverage \(http://topics.mlive.com/tag/michigan-best\)](http://topics.mlive.com/tag/michigan-best)

## Entertainment Lis

**Events** | **Music** | **Food**

Event Type

Any Region

Next 7 Days

**SEARCH**

[View all upcoming events \(http://myevent.mlive.com/web/event\)](http://myevent.mlive.com/web/event) | [Submit](#)

Notably, before "County Line" even made it to PN's stage, the script won an Edgerton New Play Award, and was chosen for the National New Play Network Showcase; according to a program note, it will also get a full production in Iowa City, as well as a staged reading in Kansas City.

So there's been a lot of excitement around the country surrounding this script. (And after **last week's flooding at PN**

([http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/performance\\_network\\_and\\_childr.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/performance_network_and_childr.html)), the fact that the company could stage the show on its original schedule is a miracle.) But in my mind, the promise of "County Line" ultimately goes unfulfilled.

"County Line" runs at Performance Network through February 16. For more information on showtimes and tickets, visit [www.performancenetwork.org](http://www.performancenetwork.org) (<http://www.performancenetwork.org>) or call 734-663-0681.

Jenn McKee is an entertainment reporter for The Ann Arbor News. Reach her at [jennmckee@mlive.com](mailto:jennmckee@mlive.com) or 734-623-2546, and follow her on Twitter @jennmckee (<http://www.twitter.com/jennmckee>).

## More Michigan Entert...



Search for ev  
throughout l

(<http://www.mlive.com/to-do/>)



Read the late  
news and re

(<http://www.mlive.com>)



Get televisio

(<http://affiliate.zap2aid=mli>)



Real Estate

Muskegon, MI

Fenton, MI

Tweet 0

Like 0

Share 0

(<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mlive.com%2Fentertainment%2Fann-arbor%2F>

## Related Stories



([http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/index.ssf/2014/01/dave\\_strack\\_early\\_architect\\_of\\_michigan\\_basketball\\_dies\\_at\\_90](http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/index.ssf/2014/01/dave_strack_early_architect_of_michigan_basketball_dies_at_90))

([http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/index.ssf/2014/01/dave\\_strack\\_early\\_architect\\_of\\_michigan\\_basketball\\_dies\\_at\\_90](http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/index.ssf/2014/01/dave_strack_early_architect_of_michigan_basketball_dies_at_90))



([http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/photo\\_gallery\\_photo\\_gallery\\_rat\\_fest\\_competition\\_celebrates\\_homebrewing](http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/photo_gallery_photo_gallery_rat_fest_competition_celebrates_homebrewing))

([http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/photo\\_gallery\\_photo\\_gallery\\_rat\\_fest\\_competition\\_celebrates\\_homebrewing](http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2014/01/photo_gallery_photo_gallery_rat_fest_competition_celebrates_homebrewing))

## Most Comments

1437 Ken Braun: Big Labor didn't class ([http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/01/ken\\_braun\\_big\\_labor\\_didnt\\_class.html](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/01/ken_braun_big_labor_didnt_class.html))

1275 Poll: Who should the Detroit Lions pick with the No. 10 pick of the 2014 NFL Draft? ([http://www.mlive.com/lions/index.ssf/2014/01/poll\\_who\\_should\\_the\\_detroit\\_lions\\_pick\\_with\\_the\\_no\\_10\\_pick\\_of\\_the\\_2014\\_nfl\\_draft.html](http://www.mlive.com/lions/index.ssf/2014/01/poll_who_should_the_detroit_lions_pick_with_the_no_10_pick_of_the_2014_nfl_draft.html))

1185 Live blog recap: Michigan takes over first place in Wolverine Live! ([http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/index.ssf/2014/01/live\\_blog\\_recap\\_michigan\\_takes\\_over\\_first\\_place\\_in\\_wolverine\\_live.html](http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/index.ssf/2014/01/live_blog_recap_michigan_takes_over_first_place_in_wolverine_live.html))

1026 Live blog: Detroit Red Wings longest home stand looking for victory in five games ([http://www.mlive.com/redwings/index.ssf/2014/01/live\\_blog\\_detroit\\_red\\_wings\\_longest\\_home\\_stand\\_looking\\_for\\_victory\\_in\\_five\\_games.html](http://www.mlive.com/redwings/index.ssf/2014/01/live_blog_detroit_red_wings_longest_home_stand_looking_for_victory_in_five_games.html))

586 Blog recap: Michigan takes lead, bounces Michigan State Spartans ([http://www.mlive.com/spartans/index.ssf/2014/01/blog\\_recap\\_michigan\\_takes\\_lead\\_bounces\\_michigan\\_state\\_spartans.html](http://www.mlive.com/spartans/index.ssf/2014/01/blog_recap_michigan_takes_lead_bounces_michigan_state_spartans.html))

See r  
(<http://www.mlive.com>)

Sign in with your MLive.com, Facebook or Google account or sign up

([https://signup.mlive.com/register/?return\\_to=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mlive.com%2Fentertainment%2Fann-arbor%2Findex.ssf%2F2014%2F01%2Fperformance\\_networks\\_county\\_li.html%23comments](https://signup.mlive.com/register/?return_to=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mlive.com%2Fentertainment%2Fann-arbor%2Findex.ssf%2F2014%2F01%2Fperformance_networks_county_li.html%23comments))

([https://signup.mlive.com/register/?return\\_to=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mlive.com%2Fentertainment%2Fann-arbor%2Findex.ssf%2F2014%2F01%2Fperformance\\_networks\\_county\\_li.html%23comments](https://signup.mlive.com/register/?return_to=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mlive.com%2Fentertainment%2Fann-arbor%2Findex.ssf%2F2014%2F01%2Fperformance_networks_county_li.html%23comments))



Entertainment