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A SPIN CYCLE OF FUN

## REVIEW: Stages' *Honky Tonk Laundry* Will Wash Your Cares Away

With its big, Lynn Anderson hair and perfect amount of fringe, this jukebox musical full of country favorites has the kind of joyous spirit we so desperately need these days.

By [Doni Wilson](#) 11/12/2020 at 4:26pm



Holland Vavra and Brooke Wilson in Stages' production of *Honky Tonk Laundry*.

IMAGE: [AMITAVA SARKAR/STAGES](#)

**LANA MAE RUNS THE WISHY-WASHY LAUNDROMAT** but secretly harbors dreams of singing onstage. Then Katie Lane stumbles into her life in the midst of a break-up and becomes her employee. Stages' regional premiere of jukebox musical *Honky Tonk Laundry* allows us to watch Lana Mae and Katie Lane's friendship grow as they ditch the no-good men in their lives and shine on a stage of their

own making. Roger Bean's foot-stomping musical comedy is energetic, engaging, and musically delicious, from the moment a leopard-print raincoat-wearing Katie Lane (Holland Vavra) walks through the door and finds Lana Mae (Brooke Wilson) sorting through the "town slut's" laundry order till the screen fades to black.

But before we get to the performances, let me tell you, this is an amazingly high-quality production. I don't know how Stages did it, but this livestream ALMOST makes it feel like you are right there. You feel the grittiness of the old-fashioned laundromat, with those connected polyurethane chairs that are all stuck together and the arsenal of laundry products—some of which are even used as musical instruments—at the ready.

In other words, the design team of Jodi Bobrovsky, Kirk Domer, and John Smetak nailed it. Sound also counts for a whole heck of a lot when we're talking about musicals, and John Peeples did an equally amazing job in that department. If you didn't like country music before this show, trust me, you will now.



Holland Vavra and Brooke Wilson in Stages's production of *Honky Tonk Laundry*.

IMAGE: [AMITAVA SARKAR/STAGES](#)

Both Houston theater favorites, Vavra and Wilson are perfectly cast in a show that, in less capable hands, could easily devolve into a cute show you really only want to see once. But no, these two have natural comedic energy, great chemistry together, and, boy, can they sing! I have always

enjoyed watching them perform, but this show might be my favorite. Sometimes with two-person shows one actor outshines the other. Not so here. You'll root for this duo just like you cheered on Thelma and Louise long ago, and that's as much a tribute to Mitchell Greco's direction and choreography as it is to Vavra and Wilson's acting.



As with any jukebox music, the show's numbers are covers, but these ones happen to be extremely well-known, and often beloved, country hits spanning several decades. It's a tall order to fill the boots of country music queens like Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, and Carrie Underwood, but these two do it.

I love Tammy Wynette, but I actually prefer Wilson's more powerful voice to Wynette's tinny laments (fighting words, I know). I was never a fan of Nancy Sinatra singing "These Boots Are Made for Walking," but I am a *big* fan of these gals singing it. Roger Bean's ability to take songs you thought you knew and braid them into a narrative that makes them shiny and new is frankly masterful.



Brooke Wilson in Stages's production of *Honky Tonk Laundry*.

IMAGE: [AMITAVA](#)

[SARKAR/STAGES](#)

Stages's *Honky Tonk Laundry* has big, Lynn Anderson hair; a perfect amount of fringe (kudos to costumer Macy Lyne), and just enough "wide open spaces" to help you move from emotional moments to

laugh-out-loud jokes without losing any of that upbeat energy.

The only downside is that this show, which is exactly the kind of joyous production we need right now, doesn't have a longer run. If I were you, I would grab a "Cowboy Casanova" (yeah, you'll hear that one) or your "Jolene" (sorry, not this one) and booty-scoot your toot over to your laptop—the singing alone is worth it. Seriously, if I could, I'd keep putting quarters in this machine just to hear Vavra and Wilson croon these tunes again and again and again.

*Thru Nov 15. \$25. Online. More info and tickets [stageshouston.com](http://stageshouston.com).*