

Review: Stages' 'Honky Tonk Laundry' is a good ol' country time at the theater

The jukebox musical is a cavalcade of country hits that is bound to put a smile on your face.

By Doni Wilson, Correspondent | July 29, 2025



Have you been dating a “Cowboy Casanova” and wish he would listen “Before He Cheats”? Do you constantly cry “I Fall to Pieces” in your relationships, or have become “Cleopatra, Queen of Denial” before getting those boots that are made for walkin’? Are you calling a L-A-W-Y-E-R for your D-I-V-O-R-C-E? Or maybe you just want people to keep their hands off your potential boyfriend so you are all ready to stand by your man when the time comes.

Stages Houston presents "Honky Tonk Laundry." Photo by Amitava Sarkar

Good news! You are in big country luck as the jukebox musical “Honky Tonk Laundry” at Stages has all the songs that you may have even memorized because they just make you want to channel your inner Tricia Yearwood and sing along. Trigger Warning: even if a song is really sad, you will be full of joy anyway because this show is so entertaining and well done.

The **Wishy-Washy Washateria** serves as the setting (with spot-on detailed design from the realistic old faded teal washers and dryers to the laundry baskets that form the foundation of a stage) from **Kirk Domer, Jodi Bobrovsky, and James Ponder**. Roger Bean’s funny and delightful romp through the dramas of Katie Lane Murphy and Lana Mae Hopkins always brings a smile. Katie Lane (a superlative Holland Vavra) is down on her luck and needs a job. Lana Mae (a stellar Brooke Wilson) runs the laundromat and needs an employee. Vavra’s ditzzy blonde is hilarious, and Wilson’s malapropisms add to the fun. Their challenges and antics might be worthy of a stand-alone show—but how wonderful to weave these songs throughout that narrative arc to mirror their emotional temperatures.

Both women have dreams and sass—a winning combination—and while Katie Lane yearns for love and Lana Mae dreams of singing stardom on a stage, their grit and performances at the Wishy-Washy will make you smile and maybe even lip-synch. They are a hard act to resist.

Expertly directed and choreographed by Mitchell Greco, this show is a delightful cocktail of comedy, camp, and country songs, spiked by sometimes laugh out loud choreography. There is also a bit of audience participation that actually works and had everyone laughing instead of the usual cringe that kind of thing usually evokes.

And that is because Vavra and Wilson are fantastic in these roles with great comedic timing and stellar voices. Remember when people actually watched “American Idol” and you hoped no one would sing a Whitney Houston or Celine Dion number, because they were never, ever going to be able to compete with those voices?

In this show you never have to worry about that, because both actresses definitely have the chops, and it is a pleasure to hear them both sing every number. Vavra really can belt out Martina McBride—no small feat. And Wilson makes Patsy Cline numbers look like a walk in the park and then shifts easily to any big hit from The Chicks. It is a marvel to watch both of them, and their ability to sustain a vivacious chemistry and not upstage each other is a testament to their formidable talents and Greco’s deft and clever direction.

With clever lines that invoke country cliches with perfect comedic timing, Bean’s show is in the tradition of his “The Marvelous Wonderettes Series.” It is great how the lives of these two women mirror the stories and emotional scenarios of your favorite country hits, reminding the audience of the power of these songs to capture the agony and the ecstasy of life’s ups and downs in a matter of a few musical minutes.

Yes, employees go to jail, no-good men cheat, and women wear “various shades of slutty.” Yet, friendships are made and there is also Xanax to put the ix-nay on social anxiety while you are “sweatin’ like Fat Elvis.” There is also foot-stomping good music to belt out while you heal the slings and arrows of life in a small Tennessee town (wonderful sound design from J. Salazar.)

With big country star hair, lots of fringe, and even rhinestoned white cowgirl boots (great costumes by Macy Lyne) it is a fun evening to wash your cares away. Even if you think you don’t like country music, you will now.

With the local Thelma and Louise running the washateria, you’ll cheer on Katie Lane and Lana Mae and their humor and physical comedy that all the great comediennes of television and stage have. You won’t want it to end. No one wants to hear Nancy Sinatra sing. But you will love hearing Holland Vavra and Brook Wilson. Just like you want to endlessly replay the songs from the great “Grand Ole Laundry Medley” that is one of the highlights of the show, you might want to see this production again and again: the happiness quotient is that high.