

Are you ready, front row?

Musical comedy inspires edge-of-your-seat watching

THEATER REVIEW

'THE FULL MONTY'

Book by Terrence McNally. Music and lyrics by David Yazbek

Directed by Russell Garrett

Through Aug. 29

Theatre By The Sea, 364 Cards Pond Road, Matunuck

BY JENNIFER NICOLE SULLIVAN

The song "Pants on the Ground" has new meaning in Matunuck. In "The Full Monty," now playing at Theatre By The Sea, men repeatedly drop trousers throughout the uproariously hilarious show. With an exuberant, high-energy cast that goes balls to the wall and lets it all hang out (literally!), it's the must-see musical of the year.

Now guys, don't worry. If you're appalled at the thought of seeing another guy's junk, "The Full Monty" is much more than that. My husband had the same concern at first, but ended up loving the musical as much as I do.

With music and lyrics by David Yazbek and book by Terrence McNally, it's based on the Academy Award nominated British film "The Full Monty," released by Fox Searchlight Pictures in 1997 starring Robert Carlyle and Tom Wilkinson. Its funny, yet heartfelt story is set in Buffalo, N.Y., instead of the film's Sheffield, U.K. Jerry (Scott Guthrie) and his co-workers at the steel mills are unemployed and the divorced father needs to pay child support to continue seeing his son Nathan (played alternately

ly by Ryan Costa and Andrew Horowitz).

Jerry and his best buddy Dave (Jean-Pierre Ferragamo) sneak into the town's strip joint, Giordano's, when they discover that Dave's wife, Georgie (Libby Tatum), organized a girls' night to see male strippers. Since the women spend \$50 to see those guys dance, Jerry figures he could make quick child-support money by gathering regular guys to perform in a one-night-only striptease. Jerry convinces Dave to strip with him in the song, "Man," when he sings, "Cause when you're swinging your cojones/You'll show 'em what testosterone is."

Soon they enlist their impish ex-co-worker Malcolm (Joel Kipper) as he's mid-suicide in his car and their prudish ex-foreman Harold (Jason Loete) who takes ballroom dance lessons. The guys hold auditions, with help from tough, old piano-playing broad Jeanette (Ellen Karsten), and find Ethan (Tyler Fish), who has a shockingly large organ and Horse (Richard Waits), an old black guy with a bum hip who claims he's hung like his nickname.

The guys deal with each of their insecurities, particularly in "You Rule My World," a duet with Dave and Harold in which Dave sings to his hairy, oversized gut and Harold sings to his vivacious, lady-who-lunches wife, Vicki (Erin Romero), who doesn't know Harold's unemployed.

After the guys finally learn to dance by imitating Michael Jordan's basketball moves and practice being around one another in their underwear, they discover their show has



Police take notice.

From left, Jason Loete, Tyler Fish, Scott Guthrie, Jean-Pierre Ferragamo, Joel Kipper and Richard Waits get ready to bare it all.

PHOTO BY MARK TUREK

had poor ticket sales. Jerry ups the ante and announces that the group will go one step further than The Chippendales and go the full monty — underwear and all.

But are the other guys willing to let their wangs hang out for a little cash? You'll have to see for yourself. Let's just say that besides a lot of G-string action, the front row gets much more of an eyeful than row L, where I was sitting. Compared to the Broadway production of "Hair" I saw earlier this year, "The Full Monty" shows just enough skin without being an anatomy class.

As Jerry, Guthrie leads the cast with his strong, regular guy ease. He and Ferragamo, as Dave, make a fun, dynamic pair. Ferragamo possesses brilliant comedic timing and at times he's vulnerable, which makes him cheek-pinchingly loveable. Waits, as

Horse, nearly takes act one for his own during his electric audition, singing "Big Black Man" like a geriatric James Brown. As Harold, Malcolm and Ethan, actors Loete, Kipper and Fish round out the ensemble with their understated vulnerability, humor and likeability.

A big standing "O" for actor/dancer Taavon Gamble who plays Keno, a professional male stripper that Georgie and her friends watch at Giordanos. Gamble revs up the audience in the musical's first scene when he strips off his pilot's uniform and gyrates his dark, muscular body in tiny hot pants. I sat forward in my chair to get a better look and several people in the audience whoo-hooed.

Other standouts include Romero as Harold's wife Vicki, who performs her solo, "Life With Harold" with

magnetic kookiness and vigor. Karsten plays the tart pianist Jeanette with excellent, dead-panned delivery and a charming smoker's voice. As Georgie, Tatum boasts sunny vocals and Costa, who performed the role of Nathan the night I saw the musical, deadpans his lines for some big laughs.

At the end of the musical, which clocks in at nearly three hours including intermission, I wanted to rewind the night and relive many of its hilarious nuggets. I can't remember the last time I had such a fun time in the theater. It's like a musical theater lapdance without the dollar bills.

ⓔ Performances Tues.-Fri., 8 p.m., Thurs., 2 & 8 p.m., Sat., 4:30 & 8:30 p.m., & Sun., 5 p.m. (401) 782-8587. www.theatrebythesea.com.

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