

Written by Thom White

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After seeing Friday's performance of *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse, I am reassessing my typical disdain for jukebox musicals, particularly those that are biographies of particular artists wrapped inside collections of their greatest hits. Playwrights Randal Myler and Mark Harelik, here, managed to create a work that – in addition to being cohesive and easy to follow – nicely weaves Williams' hits into the story and is incredibly interesting to boot. And thanks to a pleasingly lengthy, *Hee-Haw*

-esque scene in the middle of the second act, Myler and Harelik also avoid the seemingly too-frequent theatrical trend of shows with second acts that are much too serious and downbeat.

John R. Briggs' casual though not unpolished direction of this biographical play makes Circa '21's production an easy watch that also delivers the passion, energy, and emotion of Williams' music and life. *Lost Highway* opens with the ever-endearing Rachelle Walljasper, in her role as Mama Lilly, telling us a bit about the country singer's childhood, after which we're introduced to the greatest musical influence on Williams' life: Tee-Tot, a black man who helps infuse the blues into Williams' style. (The role is played, with a raspy tinge to his voice, by Tony D. Owens Jr., who appears repeatedly throughout the piece but is not a physically present character; he seems more like a ghost of influence ever-present in Williams' songs.) And from there, the musical guides us through Williams' early years as a musician, his marriage, his musical successes, and eventually his self-perpetuated, drunken demise.

Jambalaya (On the Bio): "Hank Williams: Lost Highway," at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse through March

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gives a look at the life of the country music legend, Hank Williams, who died at the age of 27 in 1953. The play is a biographical drama that explores Williams' life, his music, and his struggles with alcoholism and mental health. It is a powerful and moving story that has captivated audiences for decades.

For more information, visit Circa21.com.