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Patsy Cline show a hoot and a howl

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Alaska Highway News

The evening began in a whirlwind of meeting, greeting, and committing to memory faces and names. The producer of *Always... Patsy Cline*, the director, the chair of Stage North, one of the several donors to the production to support the Rotary's dinner theatre fundraiser.

I wasn't just a photojournalist for *Alaska Highway News* any longer, I was with the people who proudly spent six weeks of sweat and tears to make this event happen. I started to listen.

Dinner was a cornucopia of palatable joys: perfectly steamed veggies, oddly crisp caesar salad, roast beef cut to order—I went with medium rare, and it was so. Weird. Kudos, to the chefs and service at the Northern Grand Hotel.

As I savoured the delightful meal, I was told about the history of Stage North and its 40 year run of local entertaining. Did you know 1974 was the first time Fort St. John saw their first Broadway production?

I was privy to its upcoming events, but not yet exposed to what, exactly, this show was about. I was a Stage North viewing virgin, coming in with skepticism and unsure of what to expect. My skepticism hung on the actress playing Miss Patsy Cline. My mind bombarded me with constant questions, one big one, in particular: how can someone in this small city even remotely match a legend? I was prepared for a vocal butchery and feeling bad for eating such an amazing meal and faking the claps. My walls were up; defending the gracious, kind, taken-too-soon vocal angel that was Miss Patsy Cline.

A five-minute warning was given as we finished our desserts. I poured myself a coffee, took a deep breath, and sat back in my chair. The back doors opened and the band, dressed in black, walked through with a bubbly, bouffant-coiffed woman in the midst of them. OK... here we go.

The band played *Honky Tonk Merry Go Round*. It was sound and on key. Already, the room was engaged with their heads swaying; hoots and howls and clapping to the beat. The band is awesome.

Our bouffant-coiffed character, Louise, as we came to know her, stepped out to start her story. In 1957, as she was washing her dishes in the kitchen, Louise was stopped in her tracks when Miss Patsy Cline sang out on her TV from the Grand Ole Opry. Louise was an immediate fan.

And here it was: Breana Harrison at the Grand Ole Opry mic. I held my breath and closed my eyes as I was mentally cheering: *please, please, please be good*.

It was the voice of an angel. I was amazed. I kept my eyes closed and listened to Harrison belt out *Back in Baby's Arms*.

Harrison was not only able to show respect to Patsy Cline vocally, she became the vulnerable and kind woman I imagined Miss Cline to be through just through her eyes. I was hooked. Patsy Cline was a voice, and Harrison brought her to life beautifully.

Louise, played by Stevi Eby, was a perfectly annoying, but sweet American who kept the audience involved with her humour and silliness. There were moments her accent drove me insane. Eby had a difficult role to play and she walked the line with confidence and humour, confidence and naivety. Her on-the-spot improv was not lost, she seemed to read the crowd and be able to reel them in easily.

The entire evening surpassed every expectation I had. Why this is a small event for such a huge and valuable cause, to support local charities, is baffling to me. Go. Go now. Tell your friends, and tell your friend's friends to go.

The show continues Jan. 26 and 27 at the Northern Grand. Call the cultural centre box office for tickets at 250-785-1992, or Marva at 250-785-0654.



EVE PETFORD PHOTO

Breana Harrison (centre) as Patsy Cline, and Stevi Eby (right) as Louise in *Always... Patsy Cline*.