

## Review

# All Pumped Up

By: **Martin Brady**, *Nashville Scene*

**April 27, 2011**

Tennessee Repertory Theatre closes its 2010–11 season with *Pump Boys & Dinettes*, a lighthearted musical revue credited to six creators—John Foley, Mark Hardwick, Debra Monk, Cass Morgan, John Schimmel and Jim Wann—who launched the show as a restaurant entertainment and then rode it to a 1982 Tony nomination. *PB&D* is light on plot, offering succinct but colorful setups for its 20 or so numbers, an enjoyable blend of country, gospel and folkish pop.

Rep artistic director René D. Copeland handled pre-production direction and casting, then handed over the reins to choreographer Pam Atha and musical director Paul Carrol Binkley. It's a grits-and-barbecue ambience at the Double Cupp Diner along Highway 57, where two sisters (Martha Wilkinson and Brooke Bryant) sling the hash and sing songs accompanied by four multitalented employees of the gas station next door (Jeff Boyet, Brad Albin, Taylor Jones and Jeffrey Williams).

By and large the tunes are comical, with many standouts, including "Tips," "Farmer Tan," "The Night Dolly Parton Was Almost Mine" and "Serve Yourself," plus tender selections such as "Sister." The cast of six ably handles a cappella harmonies, kitchen-utensil drumming and a mostly soft-shoe approach to the dancing, which is at best serviceable to the humorous lyrics. (A tap-dance number lacked technical pizzazz but at least had heart.)

The musical star of the show is Williams — besides singing and serving up some solid honky-tonk piano licks, he regales us with accordion, harmonica and percussion.

Designer Gary Hoff's combo diner/car repair shop set is appealing and recalls a simpler time (i.e., when phones actually rang and had to be answered the old-fashioned way)—which, alas, makes the presence of a Korg electronic keyboard in the middle of the stage stand out like an anachronistic sore thumb. (Anyone who saw the show in its heyday—say, in Chicago, where it had a long run—would have seen an acoustic piano in use.)

Trish Clark's waitress and grease-monkey uniforms—complete with name emblems—are just right. Tennessee Rep's production of this popular opus isn't exactly definitive, but it's solid musical theater likely to satisfy a general audience. The show continues through May 14 at TPAC's Johnson Theater.