

# MCT finds blue-collar charm in '9 to 5: The Musical'



From left, Morgan Peters, MarNae Taylor and Sandy Lewandowski star in Mountain Community Theatre's '9 to 5: The Musical.' Photo by Donald Kerns.

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If you like plays that are slapstick, rather hokey, with broad humor yet full of down-home charm and fun, then Park Hall in Ben Lomond is the place to go in the next four weekends. Mountain Community Theater's presentation of "9 to 5: The Musical" is just that: A musical with songs and lyrics by Dolly Parton based on the appealing 1980 movie of the same name. While opening night had some sound and logistics problems, the large 22-member cast carried on enthusiastically aided by several excellent actors in some of the lead roles. Morgan Peters, who projects a unique blend of sweet sexiness in the Dolly Parton role (Doralee), Sandy Lewandowski as timid, recently divorced Judy and W. Scott Whisler as the notoriously sexist, womanizing boss Franklin Hart Jr. stand out in their roles and acquit themselves nicely as singers as well.

Peters appears completely at ease whether she's basking in the whistles and stares by Hart and other male members of the cast or using her Parton-esque Southern drawl in song. Her acting seems artless, which is harder to achieve than it looks. She's terrific when she admits her voluptuous figure can be a liability in the song, "Backwoods Barbie" (in a push-up bra).

Lewandowski is a revelation, partially because she starts out rather tentatively and colorless. But she bursts out in Act

## '9 to 5: The Musical'

Produced by: Mountain Community Theater

Directed by: Daria E. Troxell

When: Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. through Oct. 21

Where: Park Hall, 9370 Mill St., Ben Lomond

Tickets: \$25 general; \$20 senior/student; ladies night Sept. 28: Two tickets for \$22

Details: (831) 336-4777 or [www.mctshows.org](http://www.mctshows.org)

2 and clearly has the best singing voice in the show. That's why it's unfortunate her mic wasn't working in her opening song so that both the chorus and the orchestra drowned her out. By Act 2, she's become her own woman and when her ex-husband shows up to make amends after his young girlfriend dumps him, she's terrific in the dynamic "Get Out and Stay Out" number.

Whisler is able to walk that thin line between being disgustingly chauvinist and exuding sleazy charm while still looking like the boy-next-door who's innocently lost his way. It works, and he even does a decent job singing "Here for You" to Doralee.

MarNae Taylor looks somewhat uncomfortable in the role of Violet, so she waffles between being wishy-washy and then angry that she does all the work while men in the office get all the credit. The frumpy outfits she wears don't help because a woman with as much smarts as Violet would dress more like Hart's assistant Roz (a hilariously over-the-top performance by Sarah Marsh).

It's not easy to tackle a musical like this that, besides needing competent actors, also requires good singers and dancers, so director Daria E. Troxell deserves credit for corralling a good cast. Nicki Kerns's musical direction of Parton's lively score works well when she and her other six musicians play onstage behind a hip-high wall. The crowd favorite is, obviously, the opening number, "9 to 5" which became known as the working woman's anthem, and the rest of Parton's melodies are straight out of the "easy listening" category.

Choreographer Whitney James-Heskett doesn't have much to work with in the dancing category. Truth be told, some of the dance numbers are painful to watch because some ensemble members don't look comfortable doing the most rudimentary of dance steps. James-Heskett might have been better served to just reduce the size of some of the numbers and spotlight the more experienced dancers.

The musical takes a strange (but comical) U-turn in Act 2. By that time Doralee, Violet and Judy have kidnapped their boss and are keeping him hostage in his own home, in a mechanical harness above his bed. (This nefarious action was actually wildly popular with the appreciative audience.)

Of course, in a musical comedy such as this, all will be sorted out happily in the end. The instigator of all that happiness is that amiable imp of an actor, Jackson Wolffe, who, as Mr. Tinsworthy, the CEO of the company (and Hart's boss), strolls in wearing an all-white suit. He gives Hart a promotion – which looks more like a punishment – sending him off to manage the company's branch in Bolivia, then promotes Violet to fill Hart's position, and everybody – cast and audience alike – goes home happy.

Alaina Boys and her team dresses the entire cast in clothes appropriate to the late 1970s, with Hart looking fittingly dashing in a double-breasted suit and with Doralee's too-cute dresses that feature lots of crinoline petticoats and low-cut necklines. It's only Violet's outfits that somehow seem ill-suited, except for a pants outfit she wears in the last scenes.

Troxell did double duty, also designing the simple, but effective, set. Six steps lead up to the stage in the center of the theater, with plain walls (other than stripes of yellow, orange and green) on both sides. Mark Hoagland is listed as master carpenter and Taylor as the scenic artist, but there's a whole passel of set painters (in fact, most of the play's cast). Steve Edmonds does a good job with sound so that nearly every word is heard, and Avery Laurin's lighting design is solid.

Special commendation goes to MCT's hard-working stage crew because "9 to 5" has beaucoup scene changes so the crew is constantly rushing in and out with door frames, beds, desks and much more.

Despite this musical's shortcomings, MCT audiences likely will find it a big dose of corny fun, suitable for all but those under 10 or 12.