

THE BUFFALO NEWS
ENTERTAINMENT

3 Redneck Tenors Silly But Sophisticated

By Joe Sweeney NEWS CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Ever since Kid Rock and Jeff Foxworthy discovered that there's a huge market for "white trash" humor and/or pride, the worlds of music and comedy have experienced a kind of red-neck revolution. It was only a matter of time until this pop culture phenomenon found its way into other art forms.

Fueled equally by the self-effacing, dumb-as-nails shtick of Larry the Cable Guy and the sublime operatic skills of Luciano Pavarotti, The 3 Redneck Tenors bring trailer chic to musical theater. The production Wednesday night in the University at Buffalo Center for the Arts was exactly as advertised, full of jokes about trailer parks, inbreeding, wrestling and TV. It was also an impeccably executed musical performance by seasoned opera singers.



The Three Redneck Tenors — from left, Alex Bumpas, John Wilkerson and Matthew Lord — are a cross between Larry the Cable Guy and Luciano Pavarotti.

Hitting the stage in obviously fake mullet wigs, duct-taped sneakers, overalls, Dale Earnhardt gear and matching tuxedo jackets, the trio of Billy Joe (Matthew Lord, who also wrote and directed), Billy Bob (Alex Bumpas) and Billy Billee (John Wilkerson) delivered a gorgeous rendition of the Puccini aria "Nessun Dorma."

The mix of the silly and sophisticated was striking. Like any decent musical satire group, the tenors' serious melodic talents are the foundation of its act. Without the realistic musical context, any attempt at humor would fall flat.

The show had a good deal of family-friendly gags, with a script light on plot and heavy on one-liners, some which were excruciating — when a mobster asks to join the group, its manager says, "It's the Three Tenors, not the Three Sopranos!"

Thankfully, the cornball moments were outweighed by the charm of the performers. During a medley of TV themes (who doesn't love one of those?), these three large, approaching-middle-age men sang "The Love Boat" in pristine three-part harmony, undulating rowing choreography and all.

Another memorable scene involved Billy Bob and Billy Billee performing the P.D.Q. Bach song "Please Kind Sir" while wearing hideous, embarrassingly revealing tiger leotards. After the colonel hit the stage carrying a tuba, trumpet and clarinet, the guys turned into an instant Creole jazz trio. Somehow, a musically adventurous moment grew out of an overweight-guys-in-tight-clothes bit.

Therein lies the value of The 3 Redneck Tenors. Unlike a lot of "redneck"-friendly acts, there's real cultural value amongst the "I'm poor and ignorant" jokes. If you brought your kids to Wednesday's show, they would have laughed at the bathroom humor along with me, while unwittingly being exposed to some exquisitely performed classical music.

That, my friends, is how you get'r done.

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