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Musical offers glimpse into sometimes crazy world of teaching

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Shots of liquor, office romance, shameless cookie addictions and much needed mentorship can all be found in the teachers lounge at Lark Elementary School, and are some of the humorous happenings in "Teachers, the Musical!" at Theatre on Main in Acworth. Centered around a teacher on the verge of retirement, Teachers, the Musical! reveals the little understood dynamics in a bureaucratic public school system. Belle Tobbins, played by Angela McCulloch, is the quintessential burnt out educator ready to cash in on her 30 years with rockin retirement plans, including sipping drinks beachside and following adventure. In walks Chrissy Collins (played by Aliya Hutcheson), a first-year teacher who's convinced her experience training cats has prepared her for teaching children. Her wide-eyed, optimistic idealism about teaching contrasts perfectly with McCulloch's character--a dry, cynical sage with realistic understandings of its hardships. Both teachers must ! endure testing pressures--if every single student doesn't pass the tests the school might close down and Tobbins will have to teach another year. The ridiculousness of every single student in the school passing standardized tests isn't just for dramatic effect, but is a poignant statement on No Child Left Behind requirements. Throw in a nagging, bossy school secretary (Joyce Pukas), a silent weary janitor and "Satan's spawn"--a bad behaving trickster fourth grade student (Brian Gamel)--and Lark Elementary seems completely doomed. Even the absent, bird-brained principal Larry Sludge (played by Barry Hopkins) is losing faith in his school. The secretary Doris Gross is portrayed beautifully by Puskas. Her mannerisms, frail body and wrinkled nose are reminiscent of every annoying paper-work obsessed school administrator, and Gross's almost physical interpretation of the script is rare for community theater. Her voice is second to McCulloch and Collins, who song-bird voices are ! memorizing alone and soothing when combined. There seems to be! more si nging than speaking, the song themes--ranging from the 'bathroom dance' teachers do when they need to go and can't leave the class to endless interruptions from the office--are cleverly loaded with funny insights into education. The second half focuses on the personal love lives of its three leading ladies. Tobbins is falling fast for the young man who stocks the vending machines (Justin Speck); Collins is slowly waking up to the neglectful ways of her seven-year boyfriend and Gross can't hide her affection for the principal much longer. It spoke to the fact that teachers have personal lives, fears, desires and insecurities like everyone else. The outcome of "Teachers, the Musical!" is a comical but complex look into teaching. They have heart but can get discouraged; they have professional skill but are undermined by state regulations; and they love as passionately as the students they touch. Copyright 2007, Marietta Daily Journal. All Rights Reserved.