



BEST LIL' WHOREHOUSE COMES TO PRESCOTT - DAVID STRINGER, PUBLISHER

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Photo: The full cast with the author

The Prescott Center for the Arts has staged a witty and spirited revival of the 1978 Broadway hit musical, “The Best Lil’ Whorehouse in Texas”. With the nightly news full of reports of a former President’s alleged escapades with porn stars and Las Vegas hookers, the production couldn’t be more timely. Regular Prescott theatergoers will enjoy the excellent production qualities and fine performances of familiar local actors. Others will enjoy the edgy material and the history lesson about the role of prostitution in the Old West presented with humor and panache.

Despite the edgy content, the original Broadway production, directed and choreographed by Tommy Tune, ran for over 1,500 performances and garnered six Tony nominations. But the “Best Lil’ Whorehouse in Texas” is best known today from the movie which was the top grossing musical of 1982, starring Dolly Parton, Burt Reynolds, Jim Nabors, and Charles Durning who was Oscar nominated for his show stopping rendition of the “Governor’s Side Step.”

The local production which opened Thursday night was directed by long time doyen of the Prescott Arts’s scene, Judy Drake. The “Best Lil Whorehouse in Texas” is a musical with a big cast—36 parts played by 13 actors. Ms. Drake had her performers well rehearsed and under good control for opening night. The cabaret seating was perfect for this production. The staging of the front parlor, looking plush and bathed in a seductive pink light was particularly effective. The period costuming—appropriately theatrical and over the top—was another nice touch. All in all, the set looked like a nice little whorehouse where anyone could feel right at home.

The story line—or the “book” as it is commonly referred to, was written by Texan, Larry King. It was based on the true story about a famed institution in La Grange, Texas, known as the Chicken Ranch, which catered to a clientele of ranch hands and oil field roustabouts from the late 1800’s and well into the mid 20th century. Reportedly, cash money was short in the early days. The name came from the proprietor’s willingness to accept chickens in payment for services. In plain words, customers could get laid for a chicken.

But good times never last. A Houston radio personality exposed the moral corruption of goings on at the Chicken Ranch, memorialized with the song “Texas Has a Whorehouse In it”. The Chicken Ranch was shut down and the good times in La Grange sadly came to an end.

In a cast of many fine performances, three stand out. Kea Byerly as the proprietor, brought very fine vocals and a strong presence to her

role as Mona Stangle. Rhiannon Murphy as Angel and Kaylyn Hagberg as Shy, had excellent stage chemistry in their scenes together. Or maybe I liked them because they were so darn pretty and done up like real hookers. In truth, everyone did a good job.

I would be remiss without mentioning that Arizona, like just about everywhere in the West-- with the possible exception of Utah-- has a history of prostitution. Tombstone has preserved their bordello's as a tourist attraction. The "Oldest Profession" was legal in Arizona until 1918 and brothels operated openly in mining towns like Bisbee, Globe and Morenci long after that. The Red Garter in Williams and Jerome's House Of Joy operated into the 1940's. Here in Prescott, back in the day, they didn't just sell whiskey on Whiskey Row.

The Prescott Center for the Arts production of The Best Lil' Whorehouse in Texas may not appeal to the prudish. But for the rest of us, it's a fun and timely reminder of part of the history of the West. The production runs thru June 2nd. Tickets can be purchased by calling the Box Office at 928.445.3286 or online at <https://prescottartcenter.org/>