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## Breakfast 'For' Champions

by Greg Boyle

Playing currently at the American Heartland Theatre (AHT) is a world premiere production of one of the funniest shows I've seen in ages. AHT has graced us with a number of musical plays having their first run in Kansas City in recent years, but *Beer For Breakfast* by Sean Grennan, outshines them all in my book.



The story line is that a group of middle-aged men, who are lifelong buddies, arrange for a guys-only weekend at the vacation home of one of them. As anyone with any experience in these matters knows that means that the agenda consists of consuming great quantities of alcohol, reminiscing, watching or talking sports, eating bad food, not cleaning up after yourself, and complaining about the women in your life. At least that's the plan when the boys show up. However, one of their numbers, the owner of the cabin, never appears. Their consternation is doubled when his wife shows up instead, changing the entire dynamic, and resetting all the rules.

The cast is terrific, as has become expected in local theatre. Scott Cordes assumes the central character TJ, and imbues him with the high-octane energy of an overgrown hyperactive child. His energy allows him to dominate the other characters, but not out of ill will or meanness of spirit. It is because TJ is the idea man with the willingness to follow them through to the end. Richard and Mark, played by Martin English and Sean Grennan, go along because TJ's ideas usually turn out

to be fun. English and Grennan give us characters whom you would want for your own best buddies; easy to get along with, low key and funny. Yes, it's the author himself playing the part of Mark, and based on his autobiography, it seems to be the character closest to him in real life. Cathy Barnett plays the wife of the missing partner, and is a comic match for anyone in the business.

The performances in the production are right on the money, but it was the writing itself that shone most brightly for me. The play is beautifully constructed. There were so many laughs that I missed some because they came too closely on the heels of the previous lines that the audience was still laughing at. However, it wasn't like viewing plays awash in punch lines. There are very few jokes in the play, and it isn't a farce. Nobody looks at the audience and does a take. The laughs are all character and situation driven. However, as is true in much of great comedy, there are areas mined for laughs that might make some people uncomfortable. But as often happens, those produce some of the heartiest laughs.

The writing is full of unexpected delights. There is banter in the first scene that we don't recognize as foreshadowing until it pays off, big time, in the final scene. Another surprise is the goofy production number that pops up in a scene midway through, complete with singing and choreography. But the topper was a piece of business that I've never, ever witnessed in six decades of watching silly comedy. It made me want to stand and applaud out of sheer admiration in the middle of a scene. I don't want to spoil for you, but here's a hint: Ricky Ricardo in triplicate. Director Paul Hough has brilliantly staged a masterpiece of modern silliness. Grennan's play deserves to become a staple of the genre.

*Beer For Breakfast* is playing at the American Heartland Theatre through Feb. 19. AHT is located in the third level of Crown Center. For tickets, call the box office at 816-842-9999, or go online at [www.ahtkc.com](http://www.ahtkc.com).

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