

Jack the Dog Woofs It Up In A Dog's Life at the American Heartland Theatre

Review By Jeannine Chatterton-Papineau

Those who relate to man's best friend will relate to the new musical comedy on stage at the heartland.

Kansas City, Mo. - infoZine - Jack, a mixed breed pooch, doesn't claim to be an intellectual whiz or an athletic phenom. He doesn't aspire to feats of daring-do or have plans to amass great wealth. He'll be the first to tell you (in fact, he IS the first to tell you) he's just an ordinary dog.

But Jack has become a star in the world premiere of A Dog's Life with book and lyrics by Sean Grennan and Music by Leah Okimoto. This is the same talented team that created Married Alive! The production is directed by Paul Hough with musical direction and keyboard by Anthony T. Edwards.

Jack is winningly played by John-Michael Zuerlein. He Jack tells us about his earliest days and then we see him at the shelter, hoping to be adopted before his time runs out. He's not alone. There's a Big Dog at the shelter, played by Nicholas Ward, and they are joined by a high strung, frenetic Little Dog played by Jessalyn Kincaid. They wriggle and wag and pant hoping to be picked by a human visitor. It makes you want to run right out to the pound.

Lucky Jack. He's rescued by Joel, played by Kurt Robbins. It's not that Joel wants a dog. Jack is intended to be a gift. When that doesn't work out, dog and man set out to adapt to one another. The experiences they share are universal dog and master experiences shown with high humor and lilting songs. Joel is a good foil for Jack, driving, walking, picking up poop, but his character is not fully developed. This is Jack's show.

Jack has a lot of personality. He's sweet-tempered and forgiving and, most of all, energetic. In Jack's world, there is a lot to explore and a lot to be wildly excited about. For starters there are car rides and walks and BACON! He may be an ordinary dog, but his reactions to life are big and all of life is an adventure. Some are small adventures, like a visit to the dog park and wasting time with Joel; some adventures are enormous. One of the most enormous: a trip to the vet to be neutered and Jack's reaction when he wakes up at home.

After adoption, Jack again meets his buddies from the pound and we get to see how they adapt to adopted life. Kincaid's Little Dog may make you change the way you feel about yapping little dogs and attention deficit disorder as she hurtles through lifezigging and zagging and chasing her tail. It's a spectacular character part and Kincaid maximized every golden moment of it.

This show is billed as a roll-over, play-dead, feel-good musical comedy and that's apt. But, as we all know, a dog's life span is relatively short. We are reminded several times that it all goes by so fast. Before we know it, Jack's gone gray and slowed down a lot. Though he's still eager to chase a ball, he has some trouble finding it and, folks, the writing's on the wall. Since this performance I've remembered some fine dogs from my past and experienced lots of dog-sorrow.

Still, Jack and his doggy buddies were memorable and entertaining and I'm glad I got to share their lives. A Dog's Life will continue through April 15, 2007, at the American Heartland Theatre, Crown Center, KansasCity, Missouri. For ticket information, call 816 842 9999.