

## Theatre Three makes tails wag with 'A Dog's Life'

By LAWSON TAITTE *The Dallas Morning News* Itaitte@dallasnews.com

Theatre Three has a great racket going these days – niche theater products.

Its basement show aimed at patrons of a certain age, *Midlife! The Crisis Musical*, just announced another extension. And on Monday the company opened another musical, *A Dog's Life*, where the target audience is pet lovers.

I guess if you're over 40 and own a dog, you can come for the matinee of one and stay for the evening show of the other.

Sean Grennan wrote the book and lyrics of *A Dog's Life*, Leah Okimoto the music for the show, which was originally performed in Kansas City. Craftsmanship isn't the creators' strong suit. Too often, the tunes are basic and the lyrics obvious, even shoddy in their rhyme schemes. But the writers know how to get a laugh and milk a tear.

*A Dog's Life* is just what the title says. We follow the life of Jack from his adoption as a pup to his peaceful old age. Joel (Cedric Neal) picks him up from the pound to give to an estranged girlfriend but winds up keeping the dog for himself.

Comic relief comes from two other mutts at the shelter, who wind up living in the same neighborhood. Little Dog (Megan Kelly Bates), a feisty, hyperactive terrier, annoys the dickens out of Big Dog (Marcus M. Mauldin). Rhianna Mack and Mark C. Guerra play assorted humans, from veterinarians to chance encounters in the park.

Director Bruce R. Coleman cast Gregory Lush as Jack. The dog's wide-eyed trust and perpetual good-natured smile are a big change of pace after a series of excellent performances as quirky, choleric types. I found all the sweet sincerity here cloying, but then I've never been a dog person. Mr. Lush does especially well when the show goes all sentimental in the second act – where he gets to play a poignant death scene that any operatic soprano would kill for.

The portrait of Joel is much less flattering. The script treads dangerously near to implying that dogs are for people who can't handle any other kind of relationship. Mr. Neal has by far the best voice in the cast, and he gets the most sophisticated song. You just wish he had more of them to sing.

Ms. Bates steals the show as the yapping, snapping terrier. She oozes with charm, which this piece thrives on. She's wonderfully inventive in her footwork as she jigs and jumps and pounces on everything in sight. Her manic tendency to chase her tail is the show's most effective running joke.

*A Dog's Life* is liable to be as big a hit for Theatre Three as *Midlife!* Ms. Bates brought her own dog to rehearsals, and the creature made a cameo appearance during the curtain speech. They're not likely to allow you to bring your pet to performances, but there will be special events that will allow patrons to adopt dogs that need a home.

**PLAN YOUR LIFE** Through June 22 at Theatre Three. Runs 155 mins. \$10 to \$40. 214-871-3300, [www.theatre3dallas.com](http://www.theatre3dallas.com).