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# 'Chaps!' offers humorous twist to singing cowboys

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It's 1944 and the BBC is hard at work reporting the news, and keeping the morale of soldiers at the front up via 24/7 radio broadcasts.

As part of that effort, producers are scrambling to prepare for the arrival of the Singing Cowboys, an American musical troupe offering the very best of American cowboy radio.

Except it's 15 minutes before air time and the group of cowboys still has not shown up in London's Studio B.

That situation and the farce that ensues is the subject of Totem Pole Playhouse's season premiere, "Chaps! The Musical."

Kicking off the 62nd season for Fayetteville's theater in the woods is a rousing jukebox musical covering all the hits from the days of Gene Autry and Tex Ritter.

Playing the asthmatic, anxiety prone producer is Gettyburg's own Robert Brown, who serves as the Assistant

foil to the radio crew is Mabel, played by Erin Lindsey Krom.

Totem Pole Artistic Director Ray Ficca has again put together a cast that complements each other well and possesses the musical talent to pull off the jukebox show. Like other openers in recent seasons, the show is an upbeat way to kick off the season, but the show did not quite tug at the heartstrings like its predecessors. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

Each of the cast members, as far as I can tell, is American, yet skillfully pulled off British accents with ease while still being able to quickly transition to singing.

And the musical accompaniment, provided by trio Darren Server, Clay Arthur, and Chris Smith, was well rehearsed and unobtrusive.

Audiences should be sure to pay attention to Bradley Wayne Smith at stage right throughout the production. He doesn't speak, but he's your traditional sound effects man, ably wielding the wind



The cast of 'Chaps.'

Technical Director and Rental Coordinator at the Majestic Theater. His character, Miles, is afraid of losing his job, no thanks to the machinations of announcer Leslie, played by

Totem Pole alum Sean Fri, and smarmy Clive, a fish and chips salesman played by JJ Kaczynski.

Rounding out the radio crew are Archie, played by

Kevin Kraft, and Stan, a mostly mute war vet in charge of sound effects, played by Bradley Wayne Smith.

Tour director for the Singing Cowboys and female

machine, triangles, thunder strips and much more. He provides good comedic relief.

Almost a member of the cast itself was the '40s era radio set created by veteran designer James Fouchard. From the accurate soundproofing, to the hulking radio microphones, the audience truly was transported to London's Studio B for two hours.

There's an unrehearsed quality about the singing, but that's what gives the play its charm. These are people that are supposed to be non-musical, so when their harmonies don't mesh — which rarely happens — or they cue in late, it flows with the spirit of the play, which is largely "we're making it work."

All in all, "Chaps!" is a pleasant way to spend an evening, and signals the beginning of another dynamite season at Totem Pole. The show continues through June 17. Tickets are available at [www.totempoleplayhouse.org](http://www.totempoleplayhouse.org).

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