

# Working-Class Act

By James Yeara

## Bingo

By MICHAEL HEITZMAN, ILENE REID AND DAVID HOLCENBERG, DIRECTED BY GLENN CASALE

ADIRONDACK THEATRE FESTIVAL, MESSIAH PARISH HOUSE, GLENS FALLS, THROUGH JULY 13

The Adirondack Theatre Festival has mastered the art of producing real musicals for real people. As with last year's comic gem *Guys on Ice*, the newest ATF offering is a first-rate regional premiere of a musical centered on the lives and loves of the working class, who are treated with dignity and integrity. *Bingo* is a 90-minute new musical boasting a tongue-in-cheek book, lots of feel-good songs and poppin' fresh performances. You won't get big-budget splash or celebrity dash, but you will get more than your ticket-price worth of straight-on humor and giggling tunes—all from characters you'd be happy to buy a beer for.

Performed perfectly in the Church of the Messiah Parish House (complete with lighted bingo board), *Bingo* focuses on the gambling-obsessed women of Hamerin County (presumably somewhere in Florida) during Hurricane Dora. The slight book has the feel of a soap opera gone trailer-park seedy. Vern (red-haired Liz McCratney, who sings and acts with the brass larynx of an actress destined to be a perfect Mama Rose) bullies her bingo-playing buddies: the comely blonde, Honey (Stacia Fernandez), whose head and heels are as light as her hair, as her "387 and a half" lovers can attest; and the aptly named Patsy (Lori Fischer, creator of the excellent *Barbara's Blue Kitchen*) with her collection of 125 multicolored rabbit feet. Minnie (Lisa Asher, who also conducts the audience participation with ease) manages the three friends during the bingo games to the calling of Sam (Kilty Reidy). The five are connected by more than the "daubing" of bingo numbers, the bouncing of ping-pong balls, and the eating of bad homemade lemon squares.

Through a hilarious series of flashbacks, the story unfolds of how Vern cast out her best friend Bernice (Jan Leigh Herndon, possessor of a smile that needs no lights to shine) 15 years ago, and how Bernice's daughter Alison (a hysterical Beth Malone, who sings past the campiness of the tunes) reconciles the friends.

It's impossible to keep from giggling at the silliness of *Bingo*. The 12 songs in the musical zip along, and the numbers are like good snack food. The inclusion of the audience during bingo games is engaging, and the earthiness of the humor—"It's not the size of the prize that matters," Sam pointedly says to a panting Honey, "it's how long you play the game"—keeps the laughter dancing along the groan line.

Particularly funny are an inspired staging of a trio of 4-foot-high troll dolls dancing backup during Patsy's "I Still

Believe in You," Honey's and Sam's "Gentleman Caller," and Alison's "Ratchet's Lament." (After revealing she is Nurse Ratchet's understudy in an "off-off-off-off Broadway" production of a musical version of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Alison sings her big number with bug-eyed glee that is chillingly funny.) While the seven performers all have their individual moments, Malone shines throughout with her high-wattage, live-wire performance and amazing singing—at the climactic bingo showdown with Vern, Malone hits a 27-second-long note that leaves the audience even more breathless than the singer. Malone's Ali-

son is the highlight of a show that leaves the audience feeling as good as it feels to shout "bingo!"