

Schlitz, meet schmaltz

Paying tribute to a honky tonk angel

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I suppose one of the defining traits of legendary talent is that it cannot be reproduced. Thousands of doughy Elvis impersonators later, there's still just one King, and Beatlemania remains a mere echo of the Fab Four. Likewise, there has only ever been, and can only ever be, one Virginia "Patsy" Cline. We don't need to be fans of early sixties country



to know that. To this day, "I Fall to Pieces" remains one of the great karaoke destroyers of all time. You can't sing it; I can't, either, though it seems to have been written for my deep baritone range.

So give it up for Kittra Coomer, who dares not one, not two, but 27 Cline numbers in a little over two hours for Capital Playhouse's production of *Always...Patsy Cline*.

It's not just a matter of hitting those "Crazy" notes, hard as that is. Cline had one of the 20th century's most distinctive voices, with more stylistic quirks than Regina Spektor covering Nicki Minaj. Coomer looks almost exactly unlike Patsy Cline, and while concert video of Cline reveals she had all the stage pizzazz of a doorknob, Coomer engages with the audience. But none of that matters as long as we hear reminders of Cline in her voice, and by golly, we do. It's a fair stab at imitating the inimitable.

Coomer carries 98-percent of the vocals, so it's up to Stephanie Nace to drive the story. Nace plays Louise Seger, a fan who met Cline in a Houston honky tonk and corresponded with her for a year before Cline died at 30 in a plane crash. Nace nails a Texas accent and lays on the obligatory cornball charm.

If you dug the Osmonds' show in Branson but wish they weren't so edgy, then *Always...Patsy Cline* is the show for you. Bonus chicken-fried kudos for Bruce

Haas's dynamite set, his spot-on harmonies with director/conductor/saloon pianist Troy Arnold Fisher, and Fisher's Crayola-red boots. Boy, howdy.