

THINGS TO DO

Review: Dad's Garage dishes up a tasty musical stew with 'Hot Jambalaya'



The cast of Dad's Garage's "Hot Jambalaya" bids farewell to New Orleans. The musical is a Mel Brooks-like parody of vintage locked-room mystery and screwball farce. Courtesy of Casey Gardner Ford


By Benjamin Carr – ArtsATL

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All of the ingredients in "Hot Jambalaya," the new original musical onstage at Dad's Garage through March 29, make for a delicious Cajun-flavored show. Don't miss it. Heck, go back for seconds.


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The show is a wacky comedy musical with a legitimately compelling, twisted murder mystery at its center, written by Atlanta talents Matt Hobbs and Travis Sharp and directed by Candy McLellan Davison. The cast is great. The jazzy songs are delightful. It all mixes surprisingly well, like a subversive off-Broadway production that will develop a cult following.

In a stage speech at the performance attended for review, [Dad's Garage co-artistic director Jon Carr](#) said "Hot Jambalaya" has been simmering in development with the theater for five years. Its original production was supposed to debut in March 2020 before the world shut down for the pandemic. If Hobbs and Sharp used all this time to polish the material, the effort is commendable. It's a crackerjack story with distinctive characters that fans of vintage locked-room mystery and screwball farce will love equally.



Credit: Photo by Casey Gardner Ford

From left: Chef (BriAnne Knights), Teddy (Trevor Rayshay Perry), Mary (Noelle McIntyre) and Captain (Alexander Hudson) perform the fun choreography of Kari Twyman in "Hot Jambalaya." Courtesy of Casey Gardner Ford

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"Hot Jambalaya" is a Mel Brooks-like parody of these genres, complete with fart jokes, yet it contains such a clever, original story that it never feels like a spoof.

In the musical, set aboard a decaying New Orleans riverboat called the Fleur-de-Lis, a gaggle of mourners gathers for the Mississippi River funeral of Papa Joe Van Horn, a cruel sewage magnate. Among them are his bitter wife Dorothy (Christina Cusack Curbelo), odd twins Teddy (Trevor Rayshay Perry) and Mary (Noelle McIntyre), a grudge-carrying chef (BriAnne Knights) and the boat captain (Alexander Hudson).



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Suspecting foul play, a spunky New York reporter named Posie (Charis Sellick) attends the funeral to investigate, which also sparks the interest of an honest, piano-playing detective named Benny (Sully Brown). Naturally, they uncover that nothing is what it seems and that danger is afoot.

Brown and Sellick have warm, wonderful chemistry, like something out of "The Thin Man" and "His Girl Friday." They're flirty and playful, and even their choreography from Kari Twyman contains great visual jokes. Their duet "Alone Together" is a highlight.

Perry is wonderful in the flamboyant role of the prodigal son, getting many of the show's best lines and a hilarious running gag about business cards. Plus, their voice is sublime.



Credit: Photo by Casey Gardner Ford

Detective Benny (Sully Brown) opens the eyes of Dorothy (Christina Cusack Curbelo) to a scary truth in "Hot Jambalaya." Courtesy of Casey Gardner Ford

McIntyre gets the nuttiest character, a woman whose inner thoughts are communicated by the baby doll she always carries. It's a strange yet effective conceit, and McIntyre's physical comedy is on point.

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Curbelo, who stepped into the role for an ill actor during rehearsals, has a terrific voice and clearly has a blast singing "Over My Dead Body." There are moments when the role requires surprising range, and Curbelo is impressive.

Knights and Hudson are amazing singers and incredibly funny throughout the show.

Davison's direction assures that the plot keeps moving at a quick pace but is always easy to follow. The costume design from Jarrod Barnes is polished and dazzling.

The performance attended for review had some minor sound glitches that resolved quickly, but the show was mostly a triumph for this script. Needs to be seen by colleges and regional theaters can discover it through. This script. Everyone would eat this up.


Those expecting something silly, slight and sweet will instead find "Hot Jambalaya" to be more savory, layered and surprising, though still fun and funny. It's really, really tasty.

THEATER REVIEW

"Hot Jambalaya"

At Dad's Garage through March 29. \$30-\$40. 569 Ezzard St. SE, Atlanta. [dadsgarage.com](#)

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