

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

CURTAIN CALLS: CCCT cooks up strong 'Grill'

By Sally Hogarty

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"FORGIVENESS HAS been a major theme for the cast and myself," says director Kimberley James of Contra Costa Christian Theatre's production of "The Spitfire Grill," which opened this past weekend at the Leshner Center for the Arts.

While forgiveness is a major theme in this poignant musical, it is certainly not something CCCT needs to ask for in this well-wrought production. From the talented quartet (Brian Roberts, Marjorie McWee, Kerry Borgen and Gretchen Egan) to the fine acting and singing, this show is a winner. Tom Matousek's detailed set, with its half walls, makes a great use of the space and, along with Stephen Gozza's lighting and sound design, transports the audience to the Spitfire Grill — the heart of the small Wisconsin town of Gilead. Laurie Kinsella's beautiful voice and subtle acting style bring Percy Talbott, a recent parolee, to life while Ann Kendrick, as Hannah, the crusty owner of the grill, adds dimension to this aging mother with secrets of her own. When Percy and Shelby, a local girl who helps out at the grill, decide to help Hannah sell the place by holding a raffle, old tensions boil up and test relationships.

The music ranges from plaintive ballads to humorous up-tempo songs. Kinsella's rendition of "Shine" and Steph Peek's (Shelby) interpretation of "Wild Bird" were especially powerful. Nephi Speer, whom audiences might remember as Contra Costa Musical Theater's beast in "Beauty and the Beast" and Bobby in "Urinetown," shines as the sheriff. Nathalie Archangel adds comedy to the show as the busybody postmistress, with veteran performer Richard Howarter bringing a slightly sinister presence to Caleb. Rounding out this talented cast are Doug Brown, Bill Dietz and Lauren Galvin