

Thursday, Mar 15, 2018

OU to present 'Hands on a Hardbody,' an all-American musical

Oakland University's School of Music, Theatre and Dance will present *Hands on a Hardbody*, an all-American musical, from March 28 through April 7 in the Varner Studio Theatre in Varner Hall.

Based on true events and a 1997 documentary of the same name, *Hands on a Hardbody* is the story of 10 hard-luck Texans, armed with nothing but hope, humor and ambition, who have a chance at literally driving away with the American Dream after entering a contest to win a brand-new Nissan hardbody truck.

The rules of the contest are simple: whoever keeps his or her hand on the truck the longest wins.

As days pass under a scorching sun, each contestant, along with the car dealer and a radio announcer, reveals their story and their vision of the American Dream.

"One of the big reasons I love this musical has to do with its deep-rooted take on humanity," said Director David Gram, assistant professor of theatre at Oakland University. "For these 10 contestants, winning this contest goes far beyond taking home the shiny red Nissan pick-up truck.

"Winning this truck affords one contestant to feed her family, offers another the ability to get a job, and a third one the opportunity to leave town," Gram added. "And finally, for all of these characters, this contest represents a form of redemption. We see them all come out on the other side of this competition having learned a little more about inner strength, resilience and what truly matters in life."

From Jesus-loving Norma Valverde and injured and out-of-work J.D. to boastful former winner Benny and hopeful dreamer Kelli, the characters in *Hands on a Hardbody* draw the audience in immediately, and over the course of the show you'll find yourself investing in their stories, their struggles and, in the end, their hopes and dreams.

The New York Times said, "You can hear America singing," in the Tony-award nominated score featuring country-rock melodies and soulful lyrics by *Phish* frontman Trey Anastasio and Amanda Green, who also wrote the lyrics for *Bring It On: The Musical* with Lin Manuel Miranda. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Doug Wright worked with Anastasio and Green to bring *Hands on a Hardbody* to life on stage.

"In what is essentially an ensemble-driven piece, Wright, Green and Anastasio allow all of their characters to experience joy and heartbreak," Gram said. "They have imbued these rural blue collar Texans with complicated character traits and attitudes that speak to a contemporary audience. Hot button topics like racism, immigration, religion, faith, and unemployment surface in moving and surprising ways."

Tickets are \$20 general admission, \$12 for students and the 10 a.m. matinee. They may be purchased online without service fees at startickets.com or by phone at (800) 585-3737. Tickets can also be purchased at the Varner Box Office on OU's campus.

Hands on a Hardbody will also feature two "shadow-signed" performances for the Deaf by [Synergy on Stage](http://SynergyonStage.com) at 2 p.m. on March 31 and 8 p.m. on April 6.

According to Synergy on Stage, "the shadow style of inclusion allows for the greatest amount of artistic and emotional access. The ASL (American Sign Language) performers are fully costumed and fully included in the actors' world, blending both languages directly on the action for the most complete audience experience."

Unlike other methods of accommodating Deaf viewers, including the use of an off-stage interpreter or captions on a screen above the stage, "shadow signing" allows ASL performers follow or "shadow" the actors on stage while interpreting, which means the audience can easily pay attention to both the sign language and the actors in the theatre.



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For more information on this and other performances by the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, call (248) 370-2030 or visit oakland.edu/mtd.

Performance Schedule:

- Wednesday, March 28 at 8 p.m.
- Thursday, March 29 at 8 p.m.
- Friday, March 30 at 8 p.m.
- Saturday, March 31 at 2 p.m.* and 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 3 at 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 4 at 8 p.m.
- Thursday, April 5 at 8 p.m.
- Friday, April 6 at 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.*
- Saturday, April 7 at 2 p.m.

* Shadow-signed for the Deaf by Synergy on Stage

