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Entertainment

## On Theater: Lone stars shine in 'Tuna'

By Tom Titus

Deep in the heart of Texas lies the state's third-smallest town of Tuna, population 287, where the Lions Club is too liberal and Patsy Cline never dies.

Creators Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard established "Greater Tuna" back in 1981 and have been touring it and its three sequels around the country ever since, with Howard directing and Williams and Sears the only cast members, playing multiple roles.

Finally, the elusive rights to the comedy have been released and the American Coast Theater Company has grabbed them.

ACTC, the resident professional theater company at Costa Mesa's Vanguard University, is offering a rollicking, robust production of this hilarious and often vicious satire on small town life.

Here the onstage twosome has become a threesome, playing a total of 23 characters, with genders bent every which way.

Director Susan Berkompas and Marianne Savell enact the down-home radio announcers at station OKKK (read into that what you will), along with numerous other characters, while Vanguard graduate Markus Parker assumes nine other characterizations.

Berkompas has the fewest characters (five) but makes the biggest impression, particularly with her ditsy blond housewife Vera Carp, president of the "Smut Snatchers of the New Order," a group bent on excising the "objectionable books" from the town library. Stuff like "Roots" ("it only shows one side of the slavery issue"), "Huckleberry Finn" and "Romeo and Juliet."

Savell shines as Bertha Bumiller, reinforced both fore and aft, a harried mother of three problem kids, one of whom (Berkompas in an excellent cross-dressing stint) might be a murderer. Altogether, Savell splendidly impersonates nine characters, each with his or her own comedic quirks.

Parker busies himself with a slew of minor characters, scoring highest on two occasions, both in drag, as Bertha's chubby daughter Charlene and her cousin Pearl, who gets her jollies out of poisoning puppies.

Another recurring romp is Berkompas' lispng turn as Petey Fisk, manager of the local humane society, who has a yapping problem (Parker) on his hands and a threat from Savell's Bertha to

keep the mutt from her home, where her youngest son already has brought eight unwelcome canine guests.

The silliness plays out against a colorful backdrop of barns and Burma-Shave signs designed by Paul Eggington with artistic assistance from James Mulligan. Costumers Lia M. Hansen and Dain Ouradnik have worked overtime to individualize three actors into 23 characters.

“Greater Tuna” packs laughs by the truckload into an altogether too short two hours of entertainment. It should not be missed by those with a broad mind and a keen sense of humor.

### **If You Go**

**WHAT:** “Greater Tuna”

**WHERE:** Vanguard University, 55 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays, and 2 p.m. Sundays until June 21

**COST:** \$15 to \$20

**CALL:** (714) 619-6424

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TOM TITUS reviews local theater for the Daily Pilot. His reviews appear Fridays.

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