

Hilarious 'Squawks' skewers its marks

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Do you have the Ken Lewis blues this winter? Come in from the cold and get the cure at "Charlotte Squawks: Six Degrees of Desecration," now playing at the McGlohon Theatre in Spirit Square.

The show, created by lawyer Brian Kahn and WFAE-FM's Mike Collins (of "Charlotte Talks") is in its sixth year. The production takes aim at many local and national celebrities, institutions and trends through musical parodies. Original lyrics, most by Kahn, are set to melodies from show tunes and popular songs.

Backed by a talented group of musicians, including an outstanding Jeana Neal Borman on piano, the cast of 10 performs with a minimal set and props. There are some great costumes, designed by Bob Groghan and Paula Garofalo, particularly in the Act II songs "We Put Up a Ritz" and "Damn IKEA" (sung to "Puttin' on the Ritz" and "Mamma Mia," respectively). A large projection screen behind the actors shows a constant stream of funny accompanying photos. There is a welcoming video from former Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory that had the audience roaring even before the show began.

Companies like US Airways and Bank of America are roundly mocked, and Wells Fargo gets a particularly clever send-up in a song called "Wells Fargo Merger" (set to "The Music Man's" "Wells Fargo Wagon.") Other notable numbers in the first act include a takedown of embattled former United Way President Gloria Pace King (set to the Christmas carol "Angels We Have Heard on High"), NASCAR driver Jeremy Mayfield's claim that he doesn't do drugs in "It's Not Meth I Take" (set to The Police's "Every Breath You Take") and a plea to Panthers defensive end Julius Peppers not to leave in "Hey Jules" (set to the Beatles' "Hey Jude.")

Some familiar Charlotte topics are skewered to hilarious effect, notably the craziness of Charlotte's streets suddenly changing names and the tendency for the school district to cancel school at the slightest hint of snow. Newer Queen City issues are also lampooned, like the glut of luxury condos currently on the market and the school redistricting controversy in Myers Park.

National trends and celebrities getting the "Squawk" treatment include Facebook, Twitter, Sarah Palin, Tiger Woods and Bernie Madoff.

There are stellar voices among the cast, especially Susan Roberts Knowlson, Johanna Jowett and Robbie Jaeger. When Knowlson sings a tribute to new Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor (to the tune of "O Sole Mio") her operatic tone is impressive. Jowett and Jaeger have great comedic timing in all of the numbers, as does Beth Troutman as a foul-mouthed anchor in two "Squawks News" segments co-anchored by Collins.

Warm up with "Charlotte Squawks" and chase those bank bailout blues away.