



where you go before the show.

The naked truth: more love than lust at the District Festival

MARCH 10, 2013 BY JOSHAUST

— The guys begin their big show, promising to go the ‘full Monty.’

Photo: Jessie Dobrzynski

The Full Monty
Who [The District Festival](#)

(<http://thedistrictstages.org/>)

Where The Empire Theater, 581 State Fair Blvd. Syracuse

When Through March 24

Tickets \$20 per show; \$50 for all three

Review by *Paige Cooperstein*

‘The Full Monty’ is a production by Redhouse Arts Center and is presented as part of The District Festival, a collaborative Syracuse theater event presented by Rarely Done Productions, Appleseed Productions and The Redhouse.

The Full Monty, theater’s biggest tease, promises full-frontal male nudity by the finale. Six unlikely strippers—most, recently out-of-work factory employees—assemble out of economic necessity.

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This narrative most recently sizzled in Steven Soderbergh’s surprise summer blockbuster, *Magic Mike*. But while *Magic Mike* aims for dirty, sexy economic crisis, The Redhouse’s production of *The Full Monty* sticks more to the campy romp familiar to viewers of the original *Full Monty* movie, which came out in 1997 (The same year as *Boogie Nights* where Mark Wahlberg unfurls his goods, prosthetic though they may have been). A musical based on *The Full Monty* debuted in 2000.

You’ll have to see for yourself just how close to “barely there” The District players get. But think of this as you watch the show: Breasts are artistic, penises are vulgar. That explains why showing breasts only earn a movie rating of PG-13, while a penis earns an NC-17. It creates a whole new point of entry into the controversy sparked by Seth MacFarlane’s boob song at the Oscars.

Penis promise aside, The Redhouse made a smart choice offering *The Full Monty* to the first-ever District Festival. In October, Appleseed Productions, Rarely Done Productions and The Redhouse banded together to share resources and cross promote their productions, calling its new coalition The District. Its festival includes three productions running in rep for three weekends under The District’s guiding mission: connect, build, share. Each company must put on a show not part of its regular 2012 – 2013 season, offering a theatrical bonus to the residents of Syracuse.

Appleseed and Rarely Done Productions held joint auditions for their 2011 – 2012 seasons and started sharing resources, but The District marks The Redhouse’s first collaboration with the other two community theatres in a more organized, official way.

It’s no wonder, then, The Redhouse’s show goes the farthest to emphasize The District’s themes of connecting, building and sharing within a community. In the case of *Monty*, The Redhouse portrays the factory men building a new performance community as they learn what it takes to put on a good show.

A lot of familiar faces pop up in *Monty*. Jodie Baum – who you may remember from her larger-than-life character acting in Rarely Done’s *The Musical of Musicals* —opens *Monty* playing the brassy-throated Georgie Bukatinsky, who organizes the best strip shows in town. John Bixler (Georgie’s husband Dave Bukatinsky), Chris Baron (a bathroom plasterer turned stripper), and Marguerite Mitchell (the ex-wife of one of the unlikely strippers) all come to this from The Redhouse’s *Assassins*. Gabe DiGenova even joins the cast as the young son of one of the strippers; he most recently had a successful turn on a Central New York stage playing Arty, the younger brother, in Appleseed’s latest production, *Lost in Yonkers*.

Laura Austin sat in the front row of The Empire Theatre at the New York State Fair, where The District Festival runs through March 24. Austin, who shaved her head to play cancer patient Dr. Vivian Bearing in The Redhouse’s *W;t*, helped present *Monty* for The District Festival, along with artistic director Stephen Svoboda. Svoboda also directed *Monty*.



— The dancing ladies in ‘The Full Monty.’
Photo: Jessie Dobrzynski

The community coproduction goes still further. In a series of homegrown shout-outs, The Redhouse relocated a story originally set in the north of England to the north of New York State. The Rust Belt regions of Upstate New York can relate to

economic downturn; while Yorkshire lost steel mills, upstate lost trade and factory-based industry along the Erie Canal. The motifs of *Monty* felt right at home in Upstate New York: women talk about how their men can't "make it" in Buffalo. Other men take stabs at Ithaca, Albany or Utica, and there's an established rancor between the upstaters and the city dwellers.

"Who says Buffalo isn't cool?" Georgie asks as she starts the strip show in the opening scene.

"Nobody!" the girls in the audience cheer.

"Well our first man here is from the Big Apple – "

"BOO!" the girls jeer.

Billy Ganey plays the star stripper Buddy "Keno" Walsh. He's got the moves like Tatum; Channing Tatum that is, a true professional in *Magic Mike*. But before Georgie lets her hunk begin to take it off, she announces "We know what you want...and we're gonna give it to you!"

What you think you want materializes in the first two minutes of the show – Ganey's muscular body brimming with enthusiasm, an American flag thong the only thing between him and the "full Monty." But the rest of the show—filled with unfitting Tin Pan Alley numbers to underscore the factory workers' performances—goes a long way to prove that the reason for stripping is a lot more heartfelt and interesting than the stripping itself.

The casting works to emphasize the men's relationships over their erotic adventure. In initial protest to the idea of stripping to make easy money, John Bixler's gruff Dave Bukatinsky says to his friend Jerry, "Just call me Tina Turner. I'm a private dancer." Brian Detlefs plays Jerry Lukowski, the ring leader of the stripping operation. Detlefs has a warm voice and surprising falsetto when singing about his love for his son.

Anthony Malchar captures the hopeless Malcom McGregor with a goofy charisma. Malchar has the rubber legs of Kevin McHale (the actor who plays Artie, the wheelchair-bound member of the *Glee* ensemble, in a notable fantasy scene where he learns to dance). Malchar has something of McHale's nasal earnestness as well.

When Jerry and Dave first meet Malcolm, they find the scrawny guy trying to suffocate himself on his car's carbon monoxide. By the time they're done singing, "This world is cold and no one cares about you. But don't kill yourself, we'll do it for you," you believe these three desperate guys can support each other. They delight each other and, by extension, delight you.

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