

Review: NUNSENSE at the Barn: A Hard Habit to Break

By: Paul Recupero

Closing out the Barn Playhouse's mainstage season with plenty of funny segments and tight harmonies is NUNSENSE: THE MEGA-MUSICAL VERSION, directed by Steve DiNunno.

The "mega-musical version" is a recent expansion of the original version of NUNSENSE, which premiered in 1985. The plot involves five of the surviving 19 "Little Sisters of Hoboken"; the rest of the convent recently keeled over after chowing down on contaminated soup. The survivors had enough money to bury all but four of the stiff sisters, who have been kept in a freezer until funds can be raised for their burial, which the nuns hope to do with a variety show fundraiser that serves as the show.

Leading the events is the practical and exasperated Reverend Mother Mary Regina (Alicia Huppman), who seems to be going along with the show as a last resort. Sister Mary Hubert (Tara Feathers) is her strict second-in-command, ensuring everything stays in order. Sister Mary Leo (Laura Spohn) is the youngest and newest member and has aspirations of being the first ballerina nun. Clashing with the others is Sister Robert Anne (Alyssa Muska), a streetwise nun from Brooklyn. And then there's Sister Mary Amnesia (Theresa Arena), a cheerful and enthusiastic nun who lost her memory, including her own name, after a crucifix fell on her head years ago. Adding to the craziness is that the variety show is being performed on the set of GREASE, which the parish's middle school is currently putting on.

NUNSENSE runs with its absurd premise from the get-go, so you can sit back and just enjoy the tomfoolery as the variety show naturally goes off the rails. The "mega-musical version" adds seven more characters (five nuns, a priest, and a brother—yeah, it sounds like the setup to a joke). However, none of the new roles are given much to do, except for Sister Julia, Child of God (Jennifer Abrevaya), the cook (naturally), who is quite funny. The original version with the five-person cast is more intimate, and the humor lands stronger. That said, there are still many laughs to be had in this supersized production. The mega-musical version also allows for fuller vocals (credit to music director Laura Burhans and the live orchestra conducted by Barbara Newberry) and some fun yet manageable dancing (credit to choreographer Amanda Lamphere). Dancing nuns are always fun.

The Barn's cast is strong across the board, both in acting and singing. The varied personalities of all the main nuns are consistent and engaging. Of particular note, Huppman embodies her role as Reverend Mother. Her different manner of interacting with each nun makes her character feel real. As the most "normal" of the nuns, she's also the audience surrogate for much of the show and comically plays off the others' antics very well. Huppman also has a powerful and beautiful voice that makes her even more prominent. My favorite role, though, was Arena as Sister Mary Amnesia. She has such an earnest and eager personality that you can't help but root for her, and Arena also excels at subtle humor. I smiled whenever she was onstage. Both Huppman and Arena are also skilled in improvisation during some hilarious bits involving the audience.

The GREASE set (designed by Marianne and Steve DiNunno) serves its purpose, depicting various scenes from that musical, which the nuns use for their different acts. This is not a technical show, but elements like lighting and sound were solid overall.

The ending is fairly abrupt and appropriately silly. NUNSENSE is much more focused on its individual comic bits than its connective plot. The Barn's production is an easy recommendation for a feel-good two hours of laughs alongside impressive vocals.

If You Go...

NUNSENSE: THE MEGA-MUSICAL VERSION

Music, Lyrics, and Book by Dan Goggin

Directed by Steve DiNenno

October 1–11, 2026

The Barn Playhouse

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