

Review: URINETOWN at the Barn: A Steady Stream of Musical Comedy That Rarely Runs Dry

By: Paul Recupero

The Barn Playhouse's current production is URINETOWN (The Musical). Despite its title, this is a family-friendly musical with less potty humor and more satirical and (dare I say) existential wit. The Barn's production is a recommended fun and easy two hours of laughs, although (at least on opening night) it's a flush or two away from excellence.

The show concerns a despondent town wholly managed by the greedy and corrupt "Urine Good Company" (UGC), which keeps the town financially afloat with strict pay-toilet regulations that would make Germany blush. Basically, whenever you "gotta go," you gotta pay. Those who don't cough up the exorbitant fees are carted off to the mysterious "Urinetown," never to be seen again. So, each day, the poor and desperate citizens fill the lines at "public amenities" for "the privilege to pee" while UGC's robber barons line their pockets and twirl their mustaches.

Against this wild backdrop, we meet Bobby Strong (Vince Vuono), the dejected assistant custodian for Public Amenity #9, as he has a chance encounter with ingénue Hope Cladwell (Kayla Smull), the daughter of UGC President-Tyrant Caldwell B. Cladwell (Steve Arcidiacono). From Hope's words of inspiration and against the warning of his stern supervisor Penelope Pennywise (Alicia Huppmann), Bobby leads the poor in an all-out revolt against UGC, with unexpected results.

It's all quite funny, but the narrative's most memorable aspect is how it's framed. One of the authorities, Officer Lockstock (Joe O'Neill), also serves as the show's narrator, often breaking the fourth wall to address the audience directly. In banter with precocious poor girl Little Sally (Kit Niesen), Lockstock provides a comically sober metacommentary on the show's crazy premise and humorously lampshades the plot holes in its execution.

URINETOWN'S witty book (by Greg Kotis) is brilliant in its ability to both entertain and satirize. While the self-aware script lampoons some complex topics, including capitalism, resource scarcity, and naive idealism, it smartly refuses to take itself too seriously. The music and lyrics (by Kotis and Mark Hollmann) at times complement, and at times contrast, the show's tone, but this inconsistency is intentional (and hilarious). The songs mimic several familiar musical styles, from the old-school showstopper ("Mr. Cladwell") to the gospel powerhouse ("Run Freedom Run"), for no reason other than it's fun, and it works.

The Barn's production, directed by Steve Arcidiacono, is very strong on the vocal front. Credit to music director Barbara Newberry. The aforementioned leads all have powerful voices that match their characters. The ensemble also sings well, although the ensemble's mics sometimes drown out the soloists. The live orchestra sounds great and meshes well with the vocals. Diane Hodgkiss's choreography is also impressive, particularly in the rhythmic "Cop Song" and the three back-to-back stylistic dance numbers that start Act 2. The choreography is entertaining while keeping everything at a manageable level, albeit some cast members were more sure of their steps than others. Standout dancers include Raina Murdock and Kim Zawadzki, who play featured ensemble roles.

For URINETOWN'S cleverly crafted script to pop on stage, everything needs to be fluid and laser-focused. Much of the Barn's production meets this high threshold. O'Neill "works the

audience” well, grabbing attention from his opening line and nailing Lockstock’s hilarious delivery throughout. Also consistently “in the moment” are most of the town’s downtrodden, including Murdock and Zawadzki, as well as Jen Dinan and Ross Weisman in their comically engaging characters. At least on opening night, though, a few elements came across as more mechanical than natural. While most characters were fun to watch on their own, some character connections and chemistry were inconsistent. Additionally, it was cool to see the cast move around the varied playing spaces in the multilevel set in many segments, but in some parts the blocking was noticeably stilted.

That said, the cast and production team deserve high praise for adapting well to some major last-minute toilet wrenches. Director Arcidiacono stepped in for the principal role of Cladwell when the actor who had been cast had to leave the show two weeks before opening. While this replacement was barely noticeable in his performance, the circumstances likely placed additional demands on the production process during these critical two weeks. Also, another cast member injured his leg in the days leading up to opening, requiring late changes to the ensemble’s staging and dancing. That the Barn’s production persevered through such tumult is a testament to a strong work ethic.

The technical elements were solid overall on opening night. Lighting of the various playing spaces was done well, with a few brief moments when the lighting and characters did not find each other. Aside from the mentioned issue of some overpowering ensemble vocals, everyone was easy to hear—a credit to both the sound design and the cast’s excellent diction. Scene changes were mostly smooth, although I wish the UGC headquarters set had made its referenced return at the end of the next-to-last musical number.

Despite a few leaks, the Barn’s URINETOWN succeeds where it matters most: delivering the show’s sharp satire, infectious energy, and delightfully absurd sense of humor.

If You Go...

URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL

Music by Mark Hollmann

Lyrics by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis

Book by Greg Kotis

Directed by Steve Arcidiacono

May 29–June 13, 2026

The Barn Playhouse

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