

The Price of Going Viral

A review of The Barn's *Bonnie and Clyde*

By Shelli Pentimall Bookler

"Freedom is something I gotta steal." Looking at the Musical *Bonnie and Clyde* from a 2026 perspective, this line from Clyde Barrow represents not only the same feeling many Americans have of escaping a system they feel has trapped them, but also that the freedoms promised to us by the Constitution have become fragile with the unstable economy, pressure on the press and institutions, and challenges to civil liberties. The Barn's production not only gives us an enjoyable night of theatre, but also gives us a reflection of where we are as a country today.



Photo credit: Justin Lamphere and Sean Brennan

Bonnie & Clyde follows the infamous Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, two young Texans who fall in love during the Great Depression and dream of escaping their poor, ordinary lives. Clyde, already involved in crime with his brother Buck, introduces Bonnie to a life of robbery and violence. As they become increasingly notorious, their crimes

bring them the fame they both desperately long for: Bonnie's desire to be idolized like Clara Bow, and Clyde's need to be remembered like Billy the Kid. This urgency to "go viral" by today's terms is what destroys their relationships, leads to their inevitable death, and the themes of *Bonnie and Clyde* almost turns into a cautionary tale for contemporary audiences obsessed with the fame defined today by likes, views and followers on social media.

Director Brittany Recupero keeps the pace moving nicely throughout and highlights the comedy needed in a musical revolving around gun violence, also perhaps a bit on the nose for today. A nice touch is having Bonnie and Clyde's car facing the audience, headlights on, exposing us as voyeurs, complicit to the violence. The orchestra, tightly directed by Mark Urmson, hover on stage throughout the production, reminisce of the passengers in Amiri Baraka's *The Dutchman*, passively allowing the brutality to continue, or perhaps numb to it.



Photo credit: Justin Lamphere and Sean Brennan

Becca Allen's portrayal of Bonnie Parker is nothing short of stunning. Her strong vocals along with an authenticity of character that lives between veiled strength and genuine innocence is captivating. Michael Mann's Clyde Barrow leans into a reprehensible character with equally strong vocals and fearlessness. Luke Biely plays an impeccable version of Buck, torn between brotherly loyalty to Clyde and allegiance to his wife, played by Erin Gouak. Tristan Monaghan's Young Clyde is played with maturity and consistency, and Paul Recupero gives a remarkable and dynamic performance as the preacher. His song *Made in America* is a standout, not only for the performance but also again for a reflection of the hardships Americans struggle with today's bleak economy.



Photo credit: Justin Lamphere and Sean Brennan

Rob Frankel's set design seems simple but creates a significant dissonance with layering of wooden pallets contrasting in direction with red vertical stripes on the

backdrop. This combined with a plastering of news headlines from the period keeps us in the time frame and reminding us of the notoriety of the title characters.

While most of the time we are immersed in the period, some of the costumes jolt the audience out of the 1930s, and the repetitive choreography misses the mark of the era. The small stage space proves challenging as the stage crew has to wheel and carry in set pieces, which unfortunately distract from significant moments of the story, and a few representative set pieces were not fully stable. Regardless, the cast had great energy and the show will continue to get stronger and smoother with every performance.

The Barn's production is a fun night of theatre, but it also functions as a timely mirror reminding us how the hunger for status can turn love into spectacle, and how the "freedom" we chase, whether in headlines or online, can be the very thing that leads to our demise.

Bonnie and Clyde runs August 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30 and September 4 & 5

More information and tickets are available at <https://www.barnplayhouse.org/>