

LOOK

A WEEKEND PLANNER

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REVIEW

You don't have to be a country fan to like Patsy's Cline of music

By Diane Dakers
Times-Colonist staff

You don't have to be a country music fan to love *A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline*.

This sizzling hot show just about breaks down the walls at the Belfry Theatre, shaking the audience to its core, thanks to singer Leora Cashe in the title role.

What a voice.

Like the legendary chanteuse she portrays, Cashe belts out one hit after another, bringing the audience to its feet, and tears to its eyes.

Presented as an on-air radio show tribute — complete with commercials and news, weather and sports reports — *A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline*, written and directed by Dean Regan, is a retrospective of the country star's career through her songs, from the mid-1950s until her death in 1963. It features more than 20 of her best-known tunes, many of which broke out of the country mould, moving to the top of the pop charts of the day.

Deejay Steve Ivings, wearing a number of different hats in this production, is a hoot. As the radio program host, he is well-informed and formal; as news- and sports-caster,

THEATRE

WHAT: *A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline*
WHEN: Runs through Sept. 2
WHERE: Belfry Theatre

he dryly relates shocking current events of the time, such as baseball star Mickey Mantle's unprecedented \$100,000 contract. But Ivings is at his best as a tacky, toupeed, plaid-clad Las Vegas comic, reciting one groaner after another, then later as a ukulele-playing warm-up act in Carnegie Hall, leading the audience in a rip-roaring *Blue Tail Fly* sing-along.

Add to the mix four hot musicians framed by a giant multicolored art deco jukebox created by set designer Ted Roberts.

Brad Clarke (drums), Jeff Moore (guitar), Lee Oliphant (bass) and Tobin Stokes (piano), outfitted in ten-gallon hats and pointy-toed boots, hum it up during their two-



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Leora Cashe belts out one hit after another — and she's really excellent

hour act, having as much fun as the audience. These unstoppable "dogies in the band" are a treat to watch and deserve much of the credit in making this production a hit.

But Cashe is the undisputed star of this show. While her voice had a few shaky moments early in Tuesday's preview performance, they were quickly forgotten, as her clear, powerful sound filled the house. Once she started singing Cline's first big hit, *Walkin' After Midnight*, halfway through Act I, there was no turning back. Cashe got bigger and better as the evening

progressed, bringing the house down with her rabble-rousing rendition of *Bill Bailey*, followed immediately by the stirring, heart-felt *Crazy*, another Cline hit.

After a near-fatal car accident in 1961, Patsy Cline — like many country singers — turned to gospel music. As a tribute to this part of the country legend's repertoire, Cashe sends chills down audience members' spines with *Just a Closer Walk With Thee*.

Whether she's singing ballads, blues or country pop, Cashe is phenomenal. And her costumes, by

designer John Pennoyer, are equally remarkable, ranging from a tight, white sequined mini dress to Cline's trademark fringed western-style costumes.

Although Cashe is not a Patsy Cline clone — nobody could be — the passion, the vocal flexibility and the rich, pure tones are there, loud and clear.

A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline is not a show to be missed. Even if you think you've never liked country music, take a chance on this one, running at the Belfry Theatre until Sept. 2.



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Leora Cashe with Steve Ivings on stage at the Belfry