

# Tap your toes to guitar, piano, and kitchen utensils with the Great American Melodrama's Pump Boys and Dinettes

By CALEB WISEBLOOD

*Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Oceano anymore.*

**PUMPED UP KICKS**  
*The Great American Melodrama and Vaudeville presents Pump Boys and Dinettes through Sunday, March 8. Tickets to the show range from \$24 to \$32. The theater is located at 1863 Front St., Oceano. Call (805) 489-2499 or visit [americanmelodrama.com](http://americanmelodrama.com) for performance times and more info.*



**BENEATH THE SURFACE**  
*Double Cupp Diner runners Prudie and Rhetta Cupp (Katie Worley-Beck, left, and Eleise Moore, right, respectively) help gas station attendant L.M. (Mark Schenfisch) let loose during the musical number, "Farmer Tan."*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN SCHULTZ

[The Great American Melodrama and Vaudeville](#) transforms its stage to 1970s North Carolina—a gas station and diner combo on Highway 57, somewhere between Frog Level and Smyrna, to be exact. *Pump Boys and Dinettes*, which runs at the theater through Sunday, March 8, pits its actors with duties of not only pumping gas and waiting tables, but performing the show’s music as well.

Similar to productions of *Million Dollar Quartet*, the music heard onstage is provided live by members of the cast. Some performers occupy traditional instruments—guitar, bass, piano, drums—while others make use of pots, pans, utensils, and whatever else they can find in the show’s truck stop kitchen setting.



**DRIVE MY CAR**  
*Pump Boys and Dinettes follows an episodic day in the life of a group of men and women working at a gas station and diner combo on North Carolina's Highway 57 during the 1970s.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN SCHULTZ

The plot follows a day in the life of four men, who work at a filling station, and two women, who run the Double Cupp Diner next door. The play is episodic, as each character gets their own chance to shine, collectively reminiscing about respective aspirations, loves won and lost, or other tales of small-town life. Station attendant L.M. (Mark Schenfisch) recalls a star-struck celebrity encounter from his past during “The Night Dolly Parton was Almost Mine”, while waitress-sister duo Rhetta and Prudie Cupp (Eleise Moore and Katie Worley-Beck, respectively) examine their daily routines at the diner during “Menu Song,” “Tips,” and other tunes.

Led by Jim (Alejandro Guterrez), who jams on his guitar throughout most of the show, the Pump Boys—which also include Jackson (Mike Fiore) and Eddie (Kurt Morrow)—take a dive into small-town nostalgia during “Fisherman’s Prayer.” The songs flow seamlessly from one to the next, as director Allison Bibicoff does a great job making the show feel grand but also casual; it’s more like a live, impromptu jam session between a group of co-workers and friends than a plot-driven stage play.

Following each performance of *Pump Boys and Dinettes* is the Melodrama's latest vaudeville revue production, titled *Too Much TV*. Helmed by director Dan Schultz, this traditional portion of the program meets side-splitting expectations, full of new skits poking fun at television shows and streaming services.

During one skit set in the earliest days of television, Ben Abbott is particularly good as an average Joe basically maneuvering into a human antenna, to get a good signal by whatever means necessary. In another sketch, Moore hilariously channels comedian Tony Clifton—Andy Kaufman's infamous alias—for a spectacularly obnoxious stand-up routine.

I won't give away the punchlines of *American Horror Story: Oceano*, but I feel like the title alone is a good cliffhanger to end this review on.



### **GUITAR HERO**

*Pump Boy Jim (Alejandro Gutierrez) jams out on his guitar during most of the show, in the Great American Melodrama's production of Pump Boys and Dinettes.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN SCHULTZ

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