

Temple Theatre of Sanford's Production of Church Basement Ladies Is Delightful – a Warm Play for Cold Nights – Triangle Arts and Entertainment

Martha Keravuori and Chuck Galle

By • March 11, 2018

[The cast of the Temple Theatre of Sanford's March 8-25 production of *Church Basement Ladies* includes \(from left\) Gus Allen, Shirley Proctor, Theresa McGuirk, Kathy Day, and Jeanne Adams-Koonce](#)

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Inspired by the books of [Janet Letnes Martin](#) and [Suzann Nelson](#), including the bestseller [Growing Up Lutheran](#), [Jim Stowell](#) and [Jessica Zuehlke](#) have written a very funny and warm story of life in one Minnesota church. Although there are only five performers on stage for the [Temple Theatre of Sanford's](#) entertaining and altogether delightful production of [Church Basement Ladies](#), the culture of the congregation pervades the basement, where all the action takes place. Two other unseen characters are prominent in the story.

[Temple Theatre](#) artistic director [Peggy Taphorn](#), who also serves as choreographer and costume designer for this show, has a special energy with which she brings out the fun, the pathos, and cultural change sweeping America in the Sixties (not the least of which was in the churches). This performance was fast paced, upbeat, well sung, and thoroughly enjoyed by a completely full house of enthusiastic theatergoers last Friday night.

Musical director and pianist **James Clark, Jr.** is virtually never at rest through out the show, which features music and lyrics by **Drew Jansen**; and he delivers rollicking support for singing, dancing, and story line.

The basement set is designed by **Tab May**, with an old wall telephone, a cooking island, large freezer, sinks, refrigerator, jello molds, other kitchen objects from bygone days. And it is sturdily constructed to afford some door slamming.

Lighting designer **Dallas Lafon** highlights the story well and throws a gobo of tropical palms in dreamy fashion against the back wall and lights up the cross to remind us of where we are, and to invite the audience to join in the hymns.

Sound designer **Jon McKone** provides nifty hammerings, bangings, and scrapings from the boiler room as the furnace loses usefulness.

Anyone who was around in the Sixties will recognize costume designer [Peggy Taphorn's](#) authenticity in the clothing and wigs of the period, ably assisted by **Betty Ceriello** and **Bill Sanders**.

Gus Allen, the lone man in the cast, plays Pastor E.L. Gunderson. He makes for a caring, very nice Pastor, a shepherd of his flock who are dealing with the changes of the time and of the church.

Vivian Snustad is played by **Jeanne Adams-Koonce** with a verve and joy. Vivian is a spunky elderly gal who won't give up her dominance in the kitchen for anything.

Kathy Day plays Mrs. Gilmer Gilmerson — Mavis to us all — who is going through “the change,” is hilarious and good natured even in her distress, as hot flashes attempt to rule her life.

Theresa McGuirk plays Signe Beverly Engelson, a student at the University of Minnesota, who also works in the kitchen, along with her mother, Karin (Mrs. Elroy) Engelson. McGuirk is enthusiastic, conflicted about love, and cleverly funny.

Karin (Mrs. Elroy) Engelson is in the capable hands of **Shirley Proctor**, who obviously delights in the role. She is a perfect early Sixties, church lady matron, hair-do and all. As with the other three, she has an outstanding singing voice, full bodied and musical.

This audience loved the show, a warm play for these cold nights; and we expect that more full houses are in store for this fine production.

SECOND OPINION: *March 7th Sanford, NC* **Sanford Herald** preview by **Noah Grant**: http://www.sanfordherald.com/news/the-temple-heads-to-church-church-basement-ladies-makes-long/article_09f732fe-2190-11e8-a921-ef29ec0299eb.html; *March 5th Southern Pines, NC* **The Pilot** preview: http://www.thepilot.com/news/features/church-basement-ladies-descend-on-temple-theatre/article_4ca0083c-1ccd-11e8-88eb-8fd98ea1fbdb.html; and *March 2nd Dunn, NC* **Daily Record** preview: <http://www.mydailyrecord.com/edition/the-church-basement-ladies-descend-on-sanford/>.

*The **Temple Theatre of Sanford** presents **CHURCH BASEMENT LADIES** at 2 p.m. March 11 and 15, 2 and 7:30 p.m. March 16, 7:30 p.m. March 17, 2 p.m. March 18, 2 p.m. March 22, 2 and 7:30 p.m. March 23, 7:30 p.m. March 24, and 2 p.m. March 25 at 120 Carthage St., Sanford, North Carolina 27330.*

TICKETS: \$22-\$27.

BOX OFFICE: 919-774-4155, boxoffice@templeshows.com, or <https://www.vendini.com/>.

GROUP RATES (10+ tickets): 919-774-4155, boxoffice@templeshows.com, or <http://www.templeshows.com/ticketinfo/grouppackagesandsales.php>.

SHOW: <http://www.templeshows.com/showsandevents/currentshow.php>.

***VIDEO PREVIEW:** <https://www.facebook.com/TheTempleTheatre/videos/10155893171072535/>.*

2017-18 MAINSTAGE SEASON: <http://www.templeshows.com/showsandevents/fullseason17-18.php>.

PRESENTER/VENUE: <http://www.templeshows.com/>, <https://www.facebook.com/TheTempleTheatre>, and <https://twitter.com/TempleTheatreNC>, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Theatre_%28Sanford,_North_Carolina%29.

DIRECTIONS/PARKING: <http://www.templeshows.com/visit/index.php>.

OTHER LINKS:

***Church Basement Ladies (2005 Off-Off-Broadway musical comedy):** <http://churchbasementladiesonstage.com/> and https://web.archive.org/web/20090823045724/http://www.troupeamerica.com/current_CBL.html (official websites) and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Basement_Ladies (Wikipedia).*

***Jim Stowell (book):** <http://www.jimstowell.com/> (official website).*

***Jessica Zuehlke (book):** <https://www.facebook.com/jessica.zuehlke.1> (Facebook page).*

***Peggy Taphorn (director, choreographer, and costume designer and Temple Theatre artistic director):** <http://www.templeshows.com/about/templestaff.php> (Temple Theatre bio), <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/peggy-taphorn-74888> (Internet Broadway Database), and*

<https://www.facebook.com/peggy.taphorn.7> (Facebook page).

EDITOR'S NOTE:

*[Martha Keravuori](#) is a life-long theater artist — an actress, director, and stage manager — in North Carolina, around the country, and overseas. She has a theater degree from UNC-Greensboro, and has been active in the arts in Raleigh for the past 40 years. Martha is the retired executive director of the [North Carolina Theatre Conference](#). [Chuck Galle](#) returned to Raleigh last year after a 17-year absence. He was active in community theater for many years, and directed the troupe of maximum-security inmates at Raleigh's Central Prison known as the Central Prison Players. In New England, he performed on stage, on TV, and in films. He is the author of [Stories I Never Told My Daughter — An Odyssey](#), which can be ordered on Amazon.com. [Chuck Galle](#) and Martha Keravuori previously reviewed theater for [Boom! Magazine](#) of Cary. Click [here](#) to read more of their reviews for **Triangle Review** and **Triangle Arts and Entertainment**.*

Tagged as: [Church Basement Ladies](#), [Drew Jansen](#), [Jessica Zuehlke](#), [Jim Stowell](#), [Peggy Taphorn](#), [Temple theatre](#), [Temple Theatre of Sanford](#)

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