



## Great Balls of Fire! “Million Dollar Quartet” rocks the Encore (Review) February 4, 2018

Posted by ronannarbor in [Million Dollar Quartet](#), [musical theater](#), [Musicals](#), [The Encore Musical Theatre Company](#).  
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*Million Dollar Quartet – Photo credit: Michele Anliker*

Based on an actual jam session at Sun Records in December of 1956 (the real recording is currently called *The Complete Million Dollar Quartet*, though it has had other names), this musical chronicles the impromptu session where Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Elvis Presley all wind up in Sam Phillips studio at the same time. Along for the ride is Presley’s singer-girlfriend Dyanne (in real life Marilyn Evans, who was not a singer, so Dyanne is made up here). In the actual jam session they sang Christmas carols and popular songs at the time. Here, they are replaced by some of their most famous songs. It all works well, though the book spends more time explaining the story than telling it.

What follows at the Encore Musical Theatre Company is a whiz-bang evening of 50’s Rock and Roll with the performers playing their own instruments. In this intimate venue, you feel like you are in the studio itself, and it is exciting musical theater. There isn’t much of a story. Phillips tries to re-sign Cash not knowing he’s already signed with Columbia, youthful Presley has already left Sun and signed with RCA Victor, Carl Perkins can’t find that second hit (though we all know he eventually does) and Jerry Lee Lewis’s career is about to take off. This show is about the music, and that arrives in spades. From “Blue Suede Shoes” to “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On” its all here.

Encore has assembled a remarkable cast. Alex Canty is great as Carl Perkins, as is Stephen Shore as Johnny Cash. Josh White is terrific as Elvis, and Marek Sapieyevski simply brings down the house as Jerry Lee Lewis. Kaitlyn Weickel gets her own moments to shine, and Jim Walke plays a genuine and natural Sam Phillips. Orchestra members R MacKenize Lewis (who also did the fine musical direction) on bass, and Billy Harrington on drums fill out the remainder of the ensemble. I’ll go out on a limb to say that this is far and away the most professional production that Encore has presented to date and I loved it.

The beautiful recording studio set is designed by Thalia Schramm and Greg Brand — oh my gosh that recording booth! There is excellent and colorful Lighting by Dustin Miller. Properties by Anne Donevan are exceptional. Excellent costumes are designed by Sharon Larkey Urick. Sound design is good, if a bit subdued, by Dustin Miller, Tera Woolley and Chris Goosman. (If you are worried that the band is going to be too loud, it’s not — in fact, it needs cranking up — and at my performance, Sapieyevski’s body mic was not turned up enough). It’s all nicely directed by Tobin Hissong who keeps the action moving at a steady pace and comfortable tone. Overall great work here by all.

It should be noted that the four leads are an assembled cast of professionals who have all played these parts in *Million Dollar Quartet* before at other theaters nationwide. That’s a real boon for The Encore — these are fine performers that local audiences would otherwise not see. It is also a remarkably difficult musical to present, since the

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four not only need to (somewhat) resemble their characters, they also need to be able to play their own instruments, and they are all outstanding at doing both.

The reaction to the show was ecstatic – and it hits the target market well. These are songs that we've grown up with, that we sing at karaoke bars, that we turn up when they come on the radio, and some of which we haven't heard in decades. It is a nostalgic and rock and roll filled trip down memory lane when lyrics had meaning and songs had tunes and catchy riffs...and this show catches them in their younger years: before Elvis sold out completely, Lewis built up his stardom, Perkins became the king of rockabilly, and Cash became an international superstar.

Very Highest Recommendation.

*Million Dollar Quartet runs through February 25th at The Encore Musical Theatre Company, tickets at [theencoretheatre.org](http://theencoretheatre.org), 734-268-6200, and at the Box Office, 3126 Broad Street, Dexter, MI*

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