

Title: **'Bus Stop' is classic play about heartland in 1950s**
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'Bus Stop' is classic play about heartland in 1950s

Arvada Center stages production in repertory in Black Box Theatre

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We are about 30 miles west of Kansas City. The year is 1955 and it's about 1 a.m. Wind howls, snow falls outside the windows, but the cozy Grace's Café seems warm and safe as Grace Hoyland (Kate Gleason) and Elma Duckworth (Jenna Moll Reyes) await the arrival of the bus from Kansas City. The phone is dead and they rightly assume that the highway will soon be closed because of the storm. Sheriff Will Masters (Geoffrey Kent) drops by to see that they're all right and waits with them for the bus to arrive. Country music plays softly and the empty chairs and tables, the counter cold case with food, also wait ...

"Bus Stop," playing in repertory at the Arvada Center's Black Box Theatre, is one of a number of William Inge's plays inspired by his small-town Kansas boyhood. He grew up in Independence, which had a number of well-off, white-collar residents, although his family was not wealthy. And he developed a love of theater early as his Scout troop was invited to watch traveling Broadway shows in one-night stops.

A Pulitzer Prize winner for "Picnic," Inge alternated writing and teaching through his career. Several plays, including this one, became successful movies. (Readers of a certain age may recall Marilyn Monroe as Cherie.)

The bus arrives, carrying an assortment of passengers invented by playwright Inge to represent a variety of personalities who are going to be spending the night together — and interacting — at Grace's Café while the highway crew works to clear the road to Denver.

First is cowboy Bo Decker (an excellent Sean Scrutchins), cocky, bossy and sputtering about the girl he thinks he's going to marry — who doesn't want to get off the bus with him. Virgil Blessing (Michael Morgan), his older cowboy friend, tries to calm him down as Bo mutters "I guess I never realized a gal might not love me!"

Next is Dr. Gerald Lyman (the always strong Sam Gregory), an aging academic who has been swigging on a bottle of booze secured in his pocket. "I have disapproved of my entire life," he tells young Elma, who befriends him.

Carl (Josh Robinson) is the good-natured bus driver, who finds a friend in owner Grace. After a buildup, singer/actress Cherie (Emily Van Fleet) appears and tells Elma how Bo came to see her in a nightclub where she performed and talked her into quitting her job and coming with him to the family ranch in Montana ... "A godforsaken ranch with him and his cows ..."

Skilled director Allison Watrous, who is director of education at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, has worked with a fine cast to deliver a really rewarding night at the theater. We happily anticipate the plays to follow: "Drowning Girls" and "Waiting for Godot."

IF YOU GO

"BUS STOP" plays at the Arvada Center, 6901 Wadsworth Blvd., Arvada, on a variety of dates through May 21, in repertory with "Drowning Girls" and "Waiting for Godot." See arvadacenter.org or call 720-898-7200.

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"Bus Stop" is one of three plays on the stage in the Arvada Center this season, along with "The Drowning Girls" and "Waiting for Godot." All shows are being performed by a repertory group of actors.

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