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'Don't Hug Me' a cuddly comedy

By LOUIS B. HOBSON - Sun Media

Corny doesn't begin to describe Oh Canada Eh?'s new dinner theatre comedy Don't Hug Me, now playing in Canmore.

It's a farcical sitcom-style romance with songs as silly as the show's premise.

The action takes place in the Bunyan, a tiny bar in the town of Ely, Minn., that boasts a busy tourist trade that halts the moment the temperatures drop.

Each winter, Gunner (Alastair Love) and Clara (Barbara Thorson) bicker about the worth of the bar and future of their marriage. Gunner wants to sell to local tycoon Kanute (William Petrie) and move to Florida, but Clara won't budge, even if it means divorce.

Kanute is set on buying the Bunyan for his fiancée Bernice (Natalie Forcier), who works in the bar's kitchen.

In strides Aarvid (Parris Greaves), a karaoke machine salesman who promises his Lifestyle Karaoke System will reward everyone with the happiness and success they seek.

There's little question that the show's writers Phil and Paul Olsen, patterned Aarvid after the Henry Hill character in The Music Man, who duped a town into buying musical instruments, then stole the heart of the town's librarian.

The moment Bernice and Aarvid meet, it's clear Kanute is going to be out in the cold in more ways than one.

The songs are all parodies of popular styles, and the running joke is they were written by Gunnar's former best friend Lars Jorgenson, a local lad turned popular crooner.

The humour teeters on the risqué, but is never offensive. It dispenses with subtlety, instead attacking the jokes, characterizations and songs with fearless gusto. The approach works, turning the play's weaknesses into strengths -- and producing hearty gawfaws.

SUN RATING: 3 out of 5