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The Doyle & Debbie Show

Brilliantly god-awful

by [Whit Hill](#)

From the August, 2008 issue

How easy it would be to notice "The Doyle & Debbie Show" on the Ark's November schedule, quickly dismiss it as some weird Nashville country music/comedy duo you've never heard of, and not go.

And what a mistake that would be.

I caught TDADS a couple of weeks ago at Nashville's venerable Station Inn, where they pack in crowds of tourists and locals alike every Tuesday night. It's a bit like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, with fans who've seen it dozens of times and know what's coming shouting stuff out. It's also great theater, wrapped around a gooey banana-pudding center of brilliantly god-awful country songs that somehow retain some dignity due to the humanity of the bizarre, fully realized characters who sing them. This is satire, of course--full-on skewering of iconic country music duos--but it's also layered and complex, and it is capable of making your face freeze into the Grecian mask of comedy for uncomfortable lengths of time.

Here's the premise: "Doyle" (Bruce Arntson) is a B-level country crooner on tour with "Debbie" (Jenny Littleton), the latest of his sequined sidekicks. Dressed in matching, entirely overwrought appliqued western wear, they deliver up such chestnuts as "When You're Screwing Other Women, Think of Me," "Fat Women in Trailers," "Stock Car Love," and the beautiful, artery-clogging ballad "Be Still, My Heart"--in which body

parts (including some you never really thought about) are commanded to behave in certain ways, perform tricks, etc. For all their cleverness, these are well-crafted songs, tight as a drum and nattily arranged.

Courtesy of their between-song patter (and the tense "backstage" silence of the show's fake intermission), we learn quite a lot about these two--in fact, probably more than you'd ever want to know. Doyle leers and rolls his eyes, overtaken by the sheer power of his singing and by his horniness for a decidedly uninterested Debbie.

Arntson, the show's creator and primary songwriter, is a physical comedian of, shall we say, some considerable merit. There were

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times that Tuesday night when I thought there might be something truly wrong with him, like maybe a baby alien was about to saw its way out of his midsection. Littleton, though hardly the straight man, takes a subtler approach as she gamely smiles and prances through up-tempo numbers such as "Barefoot and Pregnant" or wields her mike through the heinous anthem "For the Children"--while her own three urchins (we are told) wait outside in the car for the show to be over.

Best of all, both Arntson and Littleton are fabulous, facile, creative singers with voices that flit from style to style as Doyle and Debbie (in their words) "perform all their top hits to the very best of their ability."

Doyle and Debbie make their Ann Arbor debut at the Ark on Sunday, November 2. **AAO**

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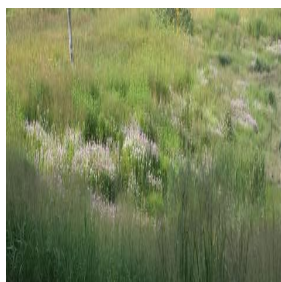
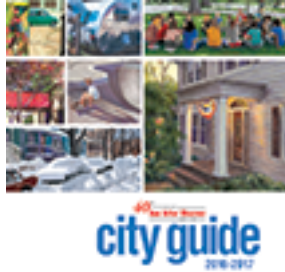


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