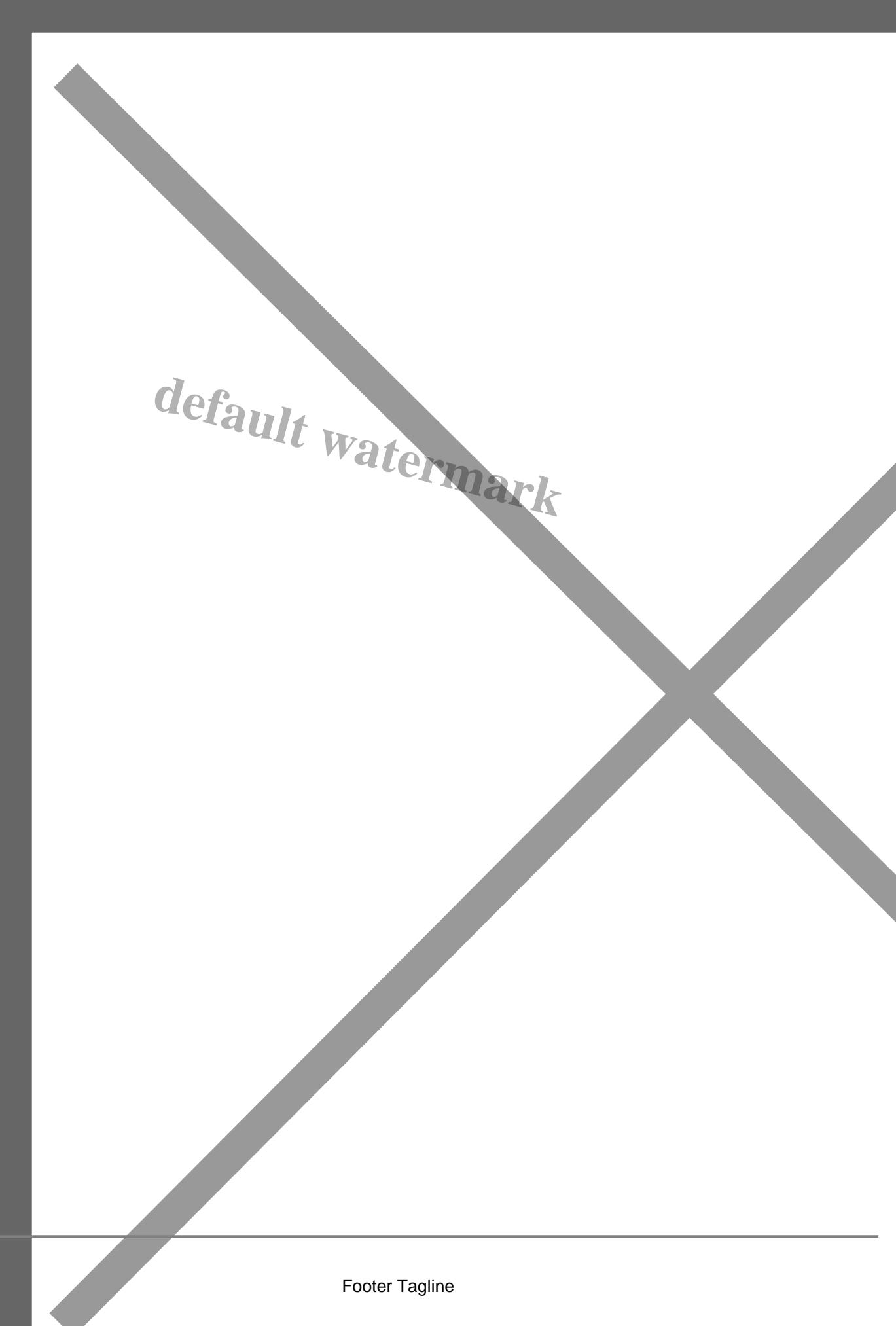


Tuacahnâ??s â??Ring of Fireâ?• Shines but Struggles to Ignite the True Spirit of Johnny Cash

Description

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Ivins, UTâ??I am a big **Johnny Cash** fan, so when I heard **Tuacahn** was putting on *Ring of Fireâ?The Musical* in their indoor **Hafen Theatre**, I decided it was time to see what this Jukebox musical is made of. Unfortunately, it did not live up to the hype of Johnnyâ??s name, but that is not necessarily Tuacahnâ??s fault. Jukebox musicals typically donâ??t function as an ensemble musical; usually, thereâ??s a lead actor (or actors) portraying the central figure, supported by a cast playing collaborators and/or a spouse. However, *Ring of Fire* deviates from this norm, presenting more like a collective or staged concert. In fact, besides mics and incredible projections (designed by [Brad Peterson](#)), Tuacahnâ??s production of *Ring of Fire* felt more like a concert because there were no props or scene changes, and the show as a whole lacked a narrative flow that one would expect in a musical.



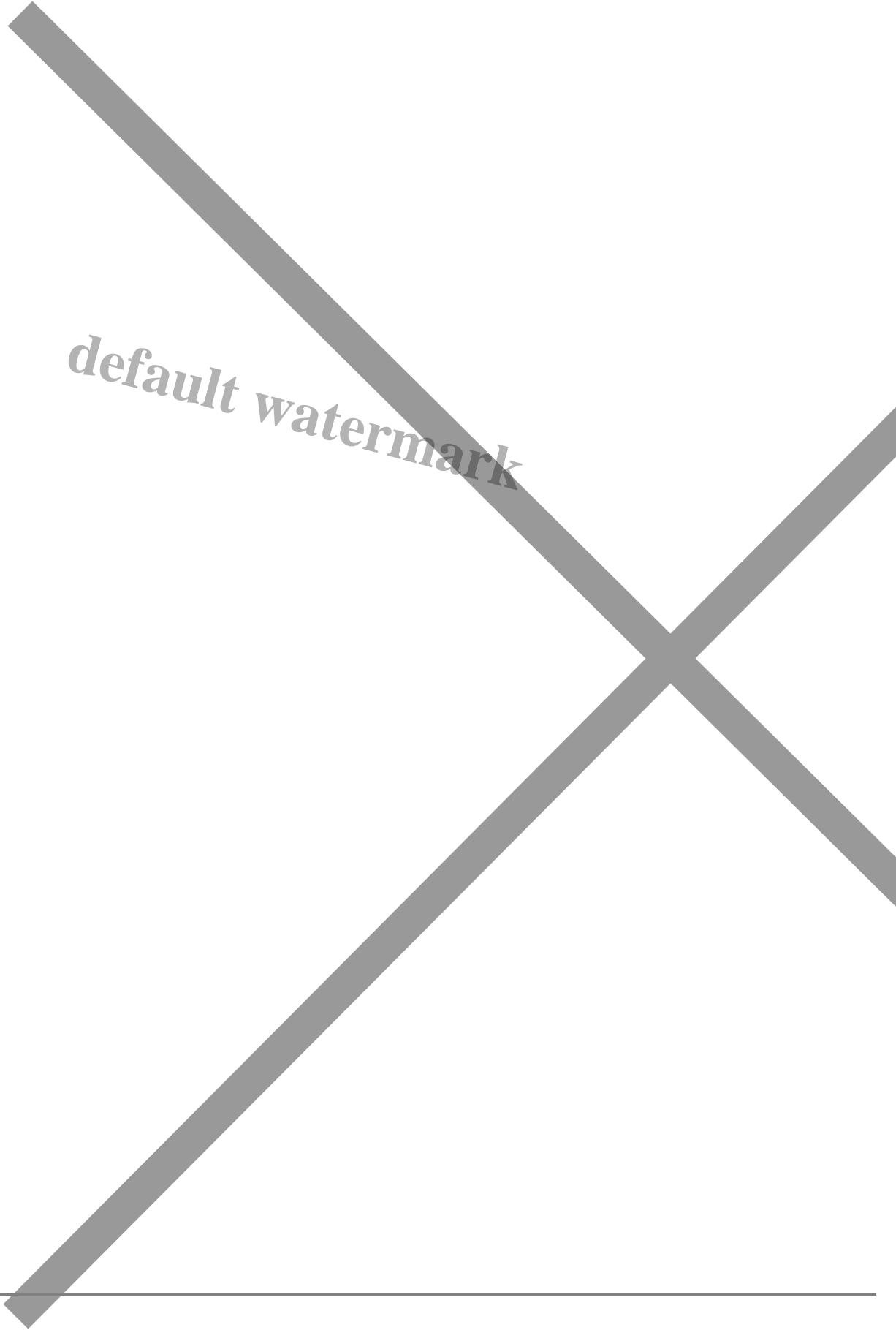
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Set at the Hafen Theatre, showing incredible projections by Brad Peterson

Originally conceived as a Broadway musical in 2006, *Ring of Fireâ??The Musical* struggled to capture the dark and complex essence of Johnny Cash, resulting in a short-lived 6-week run. Creator [Richard Maltby Jr.](#) subsequently reworked the show into a more streamlined revue, removing much of the original narrative. This revision has been performed at various venues, including an acclaimed pre-pandemic staging at [Chicagoâ??s Mercury Theater](#).

Following last yearâ??s smashing success of [Beautiful: The Carole King Musical](#), *Ring of Fire* is what some might consider a risky choice with its history. Further, according to the show program, Director and Musical Director [Scott Wakefield](#) plays the coveted role of Johnny Cash. However, when I showed up at the [Hafen Theatre](#), instead of Wakefield, [Benjamin \(Ben\) D. Hale](#) graced the stage as â??the Man in Blackâ?• and knocked this role out of the park. Dressed in a sleek black suit, Hale pulls off the genuine look and sound of Johnny Cash, with an incredible vocal range and low notes that do Johnnyâ??s songs justice, which is no easy feat.

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Benjamin D. Hales as Johnny Cash, Photo Credit: Ben Braten

The show features a talented ensemble, including Broadway veteran and recording artist [Mimi Bessette](#), [Alex Crossland](#), [Sarah Hund](#), [Valerie Larsen](#), [Zach Spound](#), [Barry Tarallo](#), and [Louis Tucci](#) all of whom are skilled vocalists and multi-talented instrumentalists. In fact, every cast member, including **Hale** (who plays Cash), plays at least four instruments while performing; some ensemble members switch between as many as seven instruments during the show. **Crossland** and **Hund** were truly impressive in this capacity. The ensembles' versatility, dynamic duets between **Hale** and **Larsen** (who plays June Carter Cash), and **Bessette's** powerful solos in "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" and "I've Been Everywhere" were standout moments of the night.

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Despite the talent, the production struggles with an unclear narrative, and the night I attended also struggled with mic issues for the first eight songs. However, this cast and production crew again impressed me with professionalism through it all. The production shines through elements like the hair and makeup by **Matthew Reeves Oliver**, especially the wigs for June Carter Cash (**Valerie Larsen**): they are top-notch. Costuming by [**April Soroko**](#) (Design) and **Faith Brown** (Costume Shop Manager) and Scenic/ Lighting Design by **Paul Black** were also visually stunning.

Johnny Cashâ??s appeal lay in his image as a romantic outlaw and his unique voiceâ??a deep, resonant sound that conveyed a sense of wounded masculinity. Unfortunately, this production lacks the sense of urgency and stakes necessary to truly honor the promise of a musical in Cashâ??s legacy. Still, given the showâ??s history, it is likely that this is something Tuacahn is not responsible for. It was clear that fans of Cashâ??s repertoire sitting next to me enjoyed the nostalgia of musical numbers like â??Walk the Lineâ?• and â??Folsom Prison Blues,â?• and while I think the narrative needs more emotional depth and intensity to truly capture the spirit of â??The Man in Blackâ?• in a musical, this show has merit and will bring joy to many audience goers who are fans of Johnny Cash.

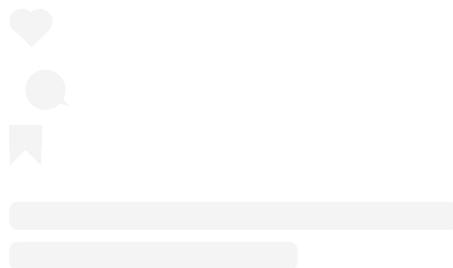
When: Now through Oct. 22

Where: Tuacahn Hafen Theatre, 1100 Tuacahn Drive, Ivins, Utah 84738

Approx. Run Time: 1 hour & 45 minutes.

Tickets: \$35-\$108 at 800-746-9882 and [Tuacahn](#).

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Tuacahn Center for the Arts presents *Ring of Fire*: The Music of Johnny Cash Created by Richard Maltby, Jr.

Conceived by William Meade

Adapted from the Broadway Production by Richard Maltby, Jr. and Jason Edwards

Performance Dates and Times: June ?? October 1, 2024, varying dates and times

Contact: 800-746-9882

[**Tuacahn Facebook**](#)

[**YouTube Ring of Fire Playlist**](#)

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