

Director puts fresh spin on a great satire

Review by [John Berger](#)
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COURTESY MANOA VALLEY THEATRE
Miss Industrial Northeast (Aaron Miko) competes for the title of Miss Glamouresse 2019 in "Pageant" at Manoa Theatre.

Manoa Valley Theatre's current production of "Pageant" — the lead-off show of MVT's 50th season — successfully approaches this lovingly detailed satire of the all-American beauty pageant from a fresh perspective. The show comes with the premise that all the contestants are played by male actors, and when MVT presented "Pageant" previously — first in 1998 and again in 2006 — it was with a traditional "boys will be girls"/"drag queen" style even though the show is not about drag queens or female impersonators. Hawaii stage veteran Brad Powell is director/choreographer of this "Pageant" and he's made it about male actors playing convincing female characters rather than about men camping it up in women's clothing.

Powell's ideas all work well, and MVT's third "Pageant" should be as big a hit for MVT

as its two predecessors. The one-liners zip. The sight gags snap. The choreography accents the other comic content. Powell has assembled a field of talented contestants.

Sultry Miss Bible Belt (Brandon Saballa) is sedate and self-confident singing "Banking on Jesus," a gospel song that expresses Christian faith in straight financial terms. Miss Deep South (Montana West Rizzuto) stars in a ventriloquism sketch involving hand puppets and Southern standards like "Camptown Races."

Miss Great Plains (Jared Duldulao) has a great showcase in a bizarre slam poetry performance. Miss West Coast (Sean Ramsey) inspired some ad hoc responses from the opening night audience with an equally bizarre interpretive dance number. Miss Texas (Anthony Lee) has one of the show's great one-liners: "My daddy says 'Just because we have more money than God is no reason to act like it!'"

Miss Industrial Northeast (Aaron Miko) quickly emerges as the adorable "ethnic" contestant who speaks English as a second language and is clearly the least prepared to compete — let alone win the title.

The six are competing for the title of Miss Glamouresse 2019. They model evening gowns, fumble their way through cringe-worthy interviews and overwrought production numbers, display their "fitness" in old-style swimsuits, tout new Miss Glamouresse products like face spackle and feminine deodorant accessories, demonstrate something in the way of talent, and help anguished callers on a beauty crisis hot line.

Chris Jackson adds innocent charm and unquenchable enthusiasm to the proceedings as the emcee — Frankie Cavalier. Jackson is a show in his own right.

Miss Industrial Northeast received the "Girl Friend" award and is then cruelly pushed aside as the other five go on to the finals. Miko returns in a new role as the previous year's Miss Glamouresse title winner, Tawny-Jo Johnson. Tawny-Jo attended so many breakfast, lunch, cocktail hour and dinner events during her reign that she's bulked up to the point where she has to wear a sequined caftan instead of a gown. Miko gives a winning performance in this new character as well.

Five members of the audience select the winner. Miss Deep South won the title on opening night Thursday, with Miss Bible Belt as first runner-up and Miss Great Plains taking second. Back in 1998 it was Miss Texas — played by Andrew Sakaguchi — who won the title on opening night.