

W H A T A W A Y T O G O

A MUSICAL COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Billy Edd Wheeler

Ewel Cornett & Dennis Burnside

This play deals with the feelings, habits, and attitudes of older men. Our 5 characters, ages 55 to 70, are retired from successful careers and meet regularly to play poker, talk about life and love, children and grandchildren, and spouses living and dead. BAXTER TYLER still has active hormones. He tells the others their aches and pains and lethargic ways will fade away if they will follow his lead and seek female companionship. There is an intimate, spirited camaraderie among this group leading them to conclude that life is indeed wonderful **IN THE COMPANY OF MEN**, their opening number.

BAXTER has a particularly good time jumping on GEORGE because GEORGE claims to be maintaining an ongoing romantic affair with his dead wife SHEILA. GEORGE turns out to be our unlikely leading man. Early in Act I we see him dance with SHEILA and sing to her: **WHAT'S A MEMORY LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS**. BAXTER introduces them to his current flame, E J BUTLER, a cloth inspector in GEORGE's cotton mill. E J is 35, BAXTER is 60. They are impressed and agree (some reluctantly) to let BAXTER give them lessons on **HOW TO PICK UP GIRLS**. They even get duded up in ridiculously young-looking clothes and head for the nearest mall to "road test" their new lines and macho attitudes. They sing **HEY-HEY BABY** and chase after girls in a strenuous dance routine, are ultimately rejected, but summon up a last spurt of energy and false confidence to sing: "Sweet ladies come thrill us, we know that it might kill us, **OH, BUT WHAT A WAY TO GO!**" They are completely exhausted as Act I ends and they all agree that true love and companionship are more desirable than sex, and require less energy.

But BAXTER goads them on and as Act II opens we see our **FIVE GUYS** in a combination aerobics/group therapy/gender sensitivity class trying to slim down, verbally sharing their life's experiences with others in the group that includes several young women and young men who portray them in flashback scenes. At this point the play becomes a sort of **STEEL MAGNOLIAS FOR MEN** as they pour out their hearts and give voice to their disappointments and concerns, their fears and anxieties. But good sense and humor prevail and soon they are back to their old joking selves, enjoying the comfortable rut they loved being in before BAXTER's girl-chasing activities led them astray.

BAXTER dies suddenly and GEORGE, finally able to let go of SHEILA (with her help), ends up with E J and the play ends with a double ceremony, a funeral and a wedding. BAXTER's ashes are put into golf clubs so he can keep on swinging (as per his wishes) and loaded into shotgun shells and he is blasted out over his favorite duck blind. There are a few surprises involving BAXTER and SHEILA at the very end as the group sings and dances, celebrating the **DANCE OF LIFE**.