

John Garcia's THE COLUMN, Tuesday June 22, 2010

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BEEHIVE, THE 60'S MUSICAL (Theatre Three)

THEATER REVIEW

BEEHIVE, THE 60's MUSICAL

Created by Larry Gallagher

Music and Lyrics by various artists

Theatre Three

Directed by Bruce R. Coleman

Musical Director - Terry Dobson

Set and Costume Designer - Bruce R. Coleman

Lighting Designer - Paul Arnold

CAST

Marianne Galloway - Janis Joplin & Others

Lisa-Gabrielle Greene - Leslie Gore & Others

Crystal Hannah - Diana Ross & Others

Britney Hudgins - Petula Clark & Others

Natalie King - Aretha Franklin & Others

Yolonda Williams - Tina Turner & Others

REVIEWED 6/19/2010 PERFORMANCE

Reviewed by Mary L. Clark, Associate Theater Critic

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What usually comes to mind when you think of the word beehive? A home for honey-making insects or a woman's hair style of the later 1950's and 60's that could be home to lord knows what. If you said the latter and are female, you just might be of the era that rolled, teased and shellacked their hair into that tower of perfection. And if you cringe at the thought of this far-out trend making a return, relax. At Theatre 3's Summer Spectacular, Beehive, the 60's Musical,

there is nary a beehive do in sight.

Presented as the bridge between the theatre's seasons, Beehive is a joyous, "wanna sing along" musical revue, chronicling several female singing sensations from the 1960's. I had been informed and, in my dutiful research, found little information neither about the show's creator, Larry Gallagher nor about the musical itself.

It had been a 1980's hit off-Broadway and produced all over the country with a varied number of performers, as read in reviews and seen on YouTube videos. While feeling at a bit of a loss for not having learned more on Mr. Gallagher, it really didn't matter.

Beehive, the 60's Musical is all about the songs, the women singers and how deeply they were influenced by social and political mores. They then influenced the newly awakening generation just beginning to emerge from the straight-laced Eisenhower era to the youthful charismatic Kennedy days. And don't think because you are an "X, Y or Z Gener" you can't relate. These are classic songs you've found and heard on your own or were a part of your parent's record collection.

Beehive takes us through the decade with a series of 40 songs sung either in their entirety or with just a verse or two. Six women of various ages (though I don't believe any actually grew up in the 60's!) starts out the show with "Let's Rock" as a crowd warmer and to let us know it's just fine to clap, sing along or even dance with the songs to come. Once again revealing my age range, I was one of the few in the audience who raised their hand when asked if they remembered "The Name Game" (or maybe just one of the few foolish enough to admit it!). You know the song "banana fana foe fana, me my moe". Ok never mind.

Beehive headed into all those songs that might be construed as not quite so "PC" today. Such as "My Boyfriend's Back" by The Angels or "I'm Sorry" by Brenda Lee and "Where the Boys Are" by Connie Francis.

Amongst those tunes, however, came a glimpse that the times they were a changin'. While Carole King asked, "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?"

Leslie Gore stated, "You Don't Own Me" and The Supremes "Come See About Me" was newly found flirtation with confidence. After Leslie, Connie and Diana, there came Petula Clark, Lulu and Dusty Springfield from the UK and then back here again with Sonny and Cher.

It was at this time I began to realize what Beehive, the 60's Musical had been created to say. When originally played on the radio, these songs were 2 minute tunes, mostly quick and light and then on to the next song.

In the format of this revue and under the direction of Bruce R. Coleman and the musical direction of Terry Dobson, the audience was allowed to hear the songs anew, sometimes at a slower pace, and we got a true sense of these women singers as the decade progressed. There is little dialogue between songs, mainly reminding us of historic facts or the trends of the period. Maybe it came back to us retrospectively but we got it.

While Act I hinted at the changes to come, Act II made certain you got the message. Tina Turner, Aretha Franklin and Janis Joplin were powerful singers who held nothing back and, as the last song by Mama Cass said, they made their "own kind of music".

Being the famous theatre in the round that it is, Theatre 3 stages mainly dead center with two small side "stages" for secondary scenes.

Bruce R. Coleman, in his usual triple threat role as Director, Set and Costume Designer, created a simple yet colorfully whimsical set with fake jukebox, larger than life lipstick tubes, back curtains of silver 45's and a "hypnotic" record painted on the floor.

A fun touch was having the stacked, round steps painted like 45 rpm "spider" or "dink" adaptors. Expensive sterling silver ones are trendy jewelry accessories presently. [Ok, lesson time: "spiders" were those round devices popped into the large holes on 45 rpm records, making them fit on the spindles of record players normally holding only 33 rpms. Now, please go ask your parents or grandparents. End of lesson].

The set's turntable held the jukebox or other pieces as the decade passed and a few of us giggled watching a crew member turn the table around as if he were a mill grinder at the wheel!

I loved and appreciated Coleman's choice not to make Beehive a fashion show. Paying homage to the rapidly and radically changing styles and avoiding major wardrobe malfunctions, he placed the whole decade onstage from the beginning. Lacy, shirt-waist dresses stood next to tunics and bell-bottom pants. Early California casual with headband mingled beside a short flapper-like dress that made more sense later on. He further understated the clothing by creating them all in black and white. Gloves and boas, a wig or two and some sunglasses accessorized the different singers or time periods. Coleman chose the music and the words over the fashion and it was an excellent decision.

Terry Dobson and the accompanying four musicians made for a full, rich musical experience. Such great music came from so few people. It was a shame to have them behind the turntable wall as I do love to watch them play. As the women were not body-miked, only on occasion was I not able to hear one or two as they turned away from my side of the theatre.

The success in this production of Beehive, the 60's Musical was held, with the assistance of Coleman and Dobson, in the hands and voices of the six women. Each of the singers held the audience and led them through this time warp with knowledge as to the underlying tone for each song. They each took the "role" of several singers and, in some performances, gave spot on imitations.

I enjoyed how their performances never had definitive setups – it seemed more like "ok, I'll be Leslie Gore and you can be Diana Ross" –a more spontaneous celebration of the women singers than a characterization.

Lisa-Gabrielle Greene was her normal pert and pretty self singing Leslie Gore's "It's My Party"

so it was good to see her turn on the drama with Diana Ross's "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me" or her more fierce side belting out Leslie Gore's "You Don't Own Me".

Marianne Galloway had the largest transition with her songs, beginning with the light and mellow Carole King, then switching gears to playfully mimic Brenda Lee's "I'm Sorry". She helped end the evening and delighted the audience with the much anticipated songs of Janis Joplin. While only a tiny bit disappointed that we didn't get the "tear up your throat", gut-wrenching wails for which Joplin was famous, I'm certainly glad Galloway chose not to ruin her vocal chords or down Southern Comfort like cough syrup on "Ball & Chain".

The deep, rich vocals of Crystal Hannah worked well as Aretha Franklin on "Natural Woman" and she sang three Diana Ross songs with Ms. Ross's unique form of showmanship and flair.

As the youngest member of the group, Britney Hudgins squeaky clean demeanor and light voice was the perfect choice for Annette Funicello (Mouseketeer ears and all) and "I Dream about Frankie". Her moving, poignant "Society's Child" by Janis Ian reflected Hudgins' deeper side and was a pin drop moment and a show highlight.

The powerful and sassy Natalie King kept proving she was a woman with something to say singing "Junk Man" and "Academy Award". It was Cher's "The Beat Goes On", however, that began the musical's true shift in thinking. The narration accompanying that song guided the audience into recalling all the conflicts our country endured at the time the song first aired. When King stepped into Aretha in Act II, she left no doubt that she was looking for a little "Respect" – and she earned it. Her duet with Hannah on "Do Right Woman" was tight and a beautiful blend of two strong voices.

Act I for Yolonda Williams was a little quieter, singing The Shangri-Las' "Walkin' in the Sand" and "She's Such a Fool" by Leslie Gore. But why she wore that little flapper-style dress became abundantly clear when Williams led Act II as Tina Turner, the early years.

Starting with "Am I a Fool?", then into "River Deep", Williams was Ms. Turner – head turning, hair flailing and legs dancing her famous moves on "Proud Mary". The other women made fine "Ikette" dancers.

Talking to some audience members after the show, my thoughts were confirmed in that, they too, sensed the obvious difference in not only the song styles between most of Act I and the remainder of the musical but in how the women sang them.

The seemed more hesitant and their voices weren't nearly as strong singing those songs about "getting the boy, keeping the boy, worrying about losing the boy" versus songs about freedom, racial equality and finding yourself; about being "proud", wanting "respect" and "doing right".

Words hold great power and those early songs of the 60's were just as powerful in their own right.

Director Coleman wrote in his notes to "listen to the words . . . these women were saying these things out loud for the first time". That is precisely what made Theatre 3's production of Beehive, the 60's Musical so enjoyable and thought provoking.

Hearing those songs, back to back – some slowed down to a blues or old gospel beat so as to catch every single word – is something we didn't get to do when they first played on the radio. Now is the chance to go back to those so-called simpler days, to a decade you either lived through or maybe wish you had, to reminisce where you were when those great songs were first heard. To "Remember . . ."

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Beehive, the 60's Musical
Playing Through July 4, 2010
Theatre Three
2800 Routh, Ste. 168
Dallas, TX 75201

Performances are Thursdays at 7:30 pm and Friday - Saturday evenings at 8 pm with Sunday matinees at 2:30 pm.

Tickets are \$25 - \$35 and may be purchased by calling Theatre Three's box office at 214-871-3300, option #1 or can be requested online at www.theatre3dallas.com