



A Singer Finds Her Voice In Captivating ‘Beautiful’

by **Leia Green**

The Cape Playhouse was packed with melodic nostalgia last Friday as the cast of “Beautiful, the Carole King Musical” took to the stage to celebrate the tremendous story of composer Carole King and her indelible sound. Directed by David Ruttura with a formulaic but uplifting script by Douglas McGrath, and featuring words and music by Gerry Goffin and Carole King and Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, this jukebox musical spotlights the original genius behind some of the biggest hits of the ‘60s and ‘70s. An endearing coming-of-age story, the two-act play follows King as she weaves her way through the challenges and triumphs of marriage, music and life, before eventually finding her voice.

Brooklyn-born King, played by a sensational Julia Knitel, gets her foot in the door of the music industry at just 16, when she sells an original tune to James Clow’s Don Krisher, a music producer famously dubbed “the man with the golden ear.” Young King is confident in her sound, but when it comes to lyrics, she finds herself lost for words. Luckily, she finds them with lyricist Gerry Goffin, an aspiring playwright played by Sam Gravitte, and their creative collaboration sparks a whirlwind romance that will ultimately be the source of much of the beautiful, and much of the ugly, in King’s life.

King and Goffin are writing music for a demanding Krisher when glamorous lyricist Cynthia Weil, played by Stephanie Martignetti, bursts onto the scene, attracting the attention of quirky composer Barry Mann, played by Trevor James. A friendly rivalry ensues between the two composing couples as they spend the next years of their careers racing to write the next big hit.

When King and Goffin are propelled to success with songs like, “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” sung by the Shirelles, and “Some Kind Of Wonderful,” sung by the Drifters, Weil and Mann fire back with the theatrical bop “On Broadway.” Dazzling renditions of these pop hits are scattered throughout the show, bookended by personal drama and scenes of a crumbling relationship between King and Goffin.

Knitel delivers an absolute standout performance as King. She belts out each King classic with powerful clarity, while ensuring her every movement and word is charged with King’s charisma and humor. Over two hours and 20 minutes, the audience witnesses Knitel’s King transform from a gawky teen into a confident woman, sure of her voice and the power it holds.

Meanwhile, Gravitte depicts Goffin’s inner turmoil with skill and sympathy as we learn the truth behind hits like the beloved “Up On The Roof,” written by Goffin as an ode to his struggle with mental health. The comedic flair of Mann and Weil counter these heavier moments, as the unlikely couple often steal the spotlight with their quippy exchanges and energetic numbers.

The audience is treated to multiple fantastic dance and song sequences as the cream of the ‘60s pop crop make appearances. The Drifters and the Shirelles are played by highly talented ensemble members, who launch the audience back in time with satisfying choreography and top-notch singing. Fatima El-Bashir also delivers a captivating performance as Goffin’s fictional mistress Janelle Woods, commanding the stage with her rendition of “One Fine Day.”

For much of the show, the stage is beautifully set up as



Sam Gravitte (Gerry Goffin), Julia Knitel (Carole King), Stephanie Martignetti (Cynthia Weil) and Trevor James Berger (Barry Mann) in “Beautiful, the Carole King Musical” at the Cape Playhouse. NILE SCOTT STUDIOS PHOTO

a retro music studio, featuring spiraling staircases, bright lights and a huffy secretary. Throughout multiple scene changes, set designer Ryan Howell ensures the set maintains a strict ‘60s vibe. The vibrant lighting scheme, the fabulous work of Kirk Goodman, also helps to emulate the era as Goodman does not shy away from bold colors and flashy creative choices.

It would be a crime not to discuss the choreography of this production, which was orchestrated by Joyce Chittick. The dance sequences performed by The Drifters were as slick as they were humorous, particularly during their standout rendition of “On Broadway.” Costume designer Gail Baldoni also kills it, especially when it comes to dressing King. King’s dramatic growth in confidence is wonderfully reflected in Baldoni’s costuming choices, as King graduates from constricting skirts to the flowing dresses she is known for.

This show has two true stars: Carole King and Carole King’s music. Each song is beautifully executed, as sound designer Emma Wilk conquers the difficult feat of doing justice to King and her sound. The play flawlessly progresses from song to song, and the seamless scene transitions are the work of stage manager Daniel Everett.

If you are lucky enough to attend this production, bring a few tissues, brush up on your Carole King, and prepare for what will likely be the best two hours of your week.



Julia Knitel as Carole King.

DETAILS

“Beautiful, The Carole King Musical”
At the Cape Playhouse, Route 6A, Dennis
Through Aug. 3
Information and reservations:
508-385-3838
www.capeplayhouse.com

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