

Review: 'Beautiful: The Carole King Musical' has crowd dancing outside The Cape Playhouse

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DENNIS — I saw “Beautiful: The Carole King Musical” from row P, near the back of The Cape Playhouse’s orchestra seating, and it was as vibrant and lovely as if I had been sitting in the front row.

It’s a trademark of good theater that the magic carries to the very last row — and beyond. The performance featuring several Broadway veterans left Friday’s sold-out audience singing, dancing and talking about the show as they made their way to the parking lot.

Julia Knitel, who played Carole King on Broadway and on the show’s first national tour, was perfect as King in The Playhouse production. A young songwriter from Brooklyn, N.Y., King (born Carole Klein) peaked early, writing her first number one hit “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” for The Shirelles at age 17.



Julia Knitel in an exuberant moment playing at Carnegie Hall, as portrayed in “Beautiful: The Carole King Musical,” at the Cape Playhouse in Dennis through Aug. 3. *Nile Scott Studios/The Cape Playhouse*

But it took King years and a failed marriage to collaborator Gerry Goffin (Sam Gravitte who played Fivero in Broadway's "Wicked") to find her voice singing her own songs on her 1971 solo album “Tapestry,” which won four Grammy awards, including best album of the year in 1972.

It is mind-boggling how many songs King wrote or co-wrote for other artists: 400 compositions performed by 1,000 artists and producing 100 No. 1 hits, according to her website, caroleking.com.

How is The Cape Playhouse production of ‘Beautiful’?



Carole King (Julia Knitel), left on the couch, and clockwise, friends and fellow songwriters Cynthia Weil (Stephanie Martingnetti, Barry Mann (Trevor James) and, seated left, first husband-Gerry Goffin (Sam Gravitte) in a scene from "Beautiful" at The Cape Playhouse. *Nile Scott Studios*

This production of the musical that opened on Broadway in 2014 is terrific. The musical numbers – brought to life by actors portraying acts including “The Drifters,” “The Shirelles” and Little Eva – were like pages in a flipbook of a Baby Boomer’s life in music.

Especially notable for me was the chemistry between King and her husband and the couple who were their best friends and fiercest competitors, songwriters Cynthia Weil (Stephanie Martingnetti, a stage and TV veteran) and Barry Mann (Trevor James). The quartet’s acting was sharp and engaging, a credit to them and director David Ruttura.

James, who writes in the program that he had “the honor” of meeting Mann (now 85) several times, portrays the musician’s self-deprecating humor especially well.

On a tiny down side, there were a couple of sound problems Friday, including microphone feedback during the "Righteous Brothers" performance of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'."



"The Loco-Motion" train led by Little Eva (Jazz Madison), far right, as part of "Beautiful: The Carole King Musical" at The Cape Playhouse through Aug. 3. *Nile Scott Studios*

Seating the full house was somewhat chaotic with patrons entering through multiple doors and clogging the aisles as ushers tried to help find seats. However I would navigate that traffic jam again in a New York minute to take in this bright, lovely show.

How to see 'Beautiful' at The Cape Playhouse

Several performances are sold out, but the show is on stage with a robust schedule (2 p.m. matinees on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and 7:30 p.m. shows Mondays through Saturdays) until Aug. 3; tickets are \$45 to \$125,

when purchased directly through [The Cape Playhouse](#), 508-385-3911. The Cape Playhouse is at 820 Main St. in Dennis.

One last note about Carole King

Knitel's exuberant performance as King – including wildly tossing those curly locks during her first Carnegie Hall performance – got me thinking about how I was privileged to see King when her “Living Room” tour was at Cape Cod Melody Tent in 2004.

Twenty years later, King, 82, is based in Laurel Canyon in the Hollywood Hills. She is on [Facebook](#), where she posts reels, sells merch and has 1.7 million followers.