



David Gauci and Davine Productions
Beautiful, The Carole King Musical

Review by Steve Davis, The Adelaide show, July 10, 2021.

There's a reason the return season of *Beautiful: The Carole King Story* is sold out; it is pure bliss.

This, so-called "jukebox musical" intertwines snippets and renditions of hit after hit, with vignettes capturing milestone moments in the creative and personal life of singer/songwriter, Carole King (Jemma McCulloch). King's career began with an early break at age 16 and through tenacity it was able to keep growing and bounding and surprising, just as this show does. There are few moments for reflection as the show lurches from her home life, to her early interactions with producer Donnie Kirshner (Brendan Cooney), her love of and collaboration with Gerry Goffin (Trevor Anderson), her successes and stresses, and ultimately her triumph with the multi-Grammy Award-winning album, *Tapestry*.

This show has some kind of wonderful knack of breathing new life into songs many of might discard as boppy, bubblegum numbers, while also triggering the wow-factor of celebrity lust as we meet the Drifters (Raffael Raschella, Sebastian Mendoza Gianotti, Dominic Saukuru, John Saukuru), the Shirelles (Sisilina Saukuru, Alisa James, Nicky TszTung Li), Little Eva (Alisa James), the Righteous Brothers (Anthony Vawser, Jordan Coulter), and even, of course, Neil Sedaka (Jordan Coulter). The Drifers' *On Broadway* was an absolute highlight, as was the Shirelles' *Will You Love Me Tomorrow?*

This is a long, clever, and completely-absorbing show that rewards the audience with musical treats like Willy Wonker in a happy mood. The narrative sets up song reference after song reference as it darts from scene to scene, with the well-oiled Davine Productions crew (led by Gavin Cianci) needing to be on-guard and eminently prepared with each beat of the show. Pianos roll on and off stage, cupboards, TV cameras, bar stages, domestic rooms, offices; this show is a Broadway-esque masterclass in stage management (without being over-engineered with mechanical monstrosities like some musicals).

Director, David Gauci, has transformed the Star Theatre into a Broadway-worthy space with formal stage for the band and the highlighted performances, and good use of the foreground and wings for domestic scenes.

Also of note is the cultural diversity of the cast. It was a joy to behold, not just for the variety of backgrounds, but for the depth of calibre; this was an ensemble without any weak links. Behind the scenes, the Musical Director, Peter Johns, has orchestrated a diverse soundscape of musical styles performed to a variety of different production levels and maturity, in keeping with the story, and The Beautiful Band truly lived up to its name. But despite the ensemble, the success of this show depends upon the stamina and power of the four key protagonists, the two power couples of music: Carole King (McCulloch) and Gerry Goffin (Anderson), and Cynthia Weil (Maya Miller) and Barry Mann (Joshua Kerr). Miller enters strongly with her sassy audition, Kerr captures the womanising hypochondriac spirit with aplomb, Anderson pulls off the challenging task of being loveable and despicable and broken, while McCulloch is simply sublime in her mastery of not just singing but of conveying King's reluctance to be in the spotlight juxtaposed against the self-awareness of having a valuable gift. Yes, it's an ensemble show, but it is McCulloch's presence and focus that ensures we won't just love her performance on the night, but we'll love it tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Beautiful: The Carole King Musical is a worthy and important time capsule of music history, which also happens to chart affairs of the heart through the formative years of rock, pop, and beyond.