

Gem's "Respect" A Musical Journey for Women

By Sue Suchyta

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Ready for a girls' night out? "Respect," a music review that chronicles the lives of women over the last hundred years, is now playing an open-ended run at the Gem Theatre in Detroit. Take a date if you must, but you'll have much more fun with your girlfriends, mom, sisters and female cousins. You'll share in the laughter as you soak in the music that has been a backdrop and reflects the lives of women everywhere.

"Respect" is all about women and the journey they've traveled for the last hundred years, from dependence to self-sufficiency. It is based on the book, "Respect: Women and Popular Music" by college professor Dr. Dorothy Marcic, that analyzes popular female song lyrics since the 1900's, and how they reflect our culture. As in each city where the show has found a home, the Detroit version has been restaged to include Motown favorites that have special appeal to its audience.

From "Someone to Watch Over Me" to "I Will Survive," "Respect" shares through song how women how survived, celebrated, stood by their men and each other, and supported each other emotionally. The songs weave a tapestry of our lives, reminding us of times of celebration, loves found and lost, and reflections on life's passages.

Kelly Shook, as the narrator, leads the four-woman musical quartet that also includes the talents of Shonka Dukureh, Marlyn Sanchez, and Sarah Madej. 3-time Tony Award winner Hinton Battle lent his directing talent to the production.

Songs are woven into a musical storyline. You'll hear, "Can't Stop Loving That Man of Mine," "Bicycle Built for Two," and "Won't You Please Come Home, Bill Bailey" in the beginning as we're reminded how Coco Chanel freed us from corsets. You'll hear the songs of the Great Depression, as Betty Boop, Shirley Temple, and Mae West helped women escape their worries through the fantasies of the silver screen.

The show covers the birth of the blues, and the Andrews Sisters in WW2, from "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" to "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." Then came the fantasy fifties: The post-war prosperity that sent Rosie the Riveter back to her suburban tract home as "Love and Marriage" and "I Enjoy Being a Girl" played in the background.

Yet as woman entered the second half of the twentieth century, they weren't ready to relinquish their power quite so easily. Sexual politics began to emerge, and we went from devoted bobby-soxers to empowered women. From, "I Will Follow Him," "I Wanna' Be Bobby's Girl," and "Sixteen Going on Seventeen," women took off their blinders and emerged to powerhouse songs like, "I Am Woman Hear Me Roar," "These Boots are Made for Walkin'," and "I Will Survive."

The songs are too numerous to mention – over sixty in all – from Aretha’s “Respect” to “This One’s For the Girls.” Many of the tunes and lyrics will trigger memories and emotions. You will leave both recharged and entertained. So next time the guys are going up north to answer the call of the wild, or are glued to the tube for another body bashing game, call up a woman or two you care about, and enjoy the musical journey at the Gem together. You’ll be glad you did.

For tickets, call the Gem Theatre box office at 313-963-9800. To order tickets on-line, call TicketMaster at 248-645-6666, or go to www.ticketmaster.com. The Gem Theatre is located at 333 Madison, across from the Music Hall, in Detroit. Pre- and post-show dining packages are also available. For directions or more information, visit their website at www.gemtheatre.com. Tickets are on sale through April 22, and group reservations are being booked through the end of May.