

the Monitor

THIS WEEK
In Metro Detroit
& Windsor

FEBRUARY 22, 2007

VOLUME XLIII NUMBER 8

FREE

Songs Express Women's Joys, Sorrows

It looks like the Gem Theatre has another huge hit with its new production of Dorothy Marcic's "Respect — A Musical Journey of Women."

Given the high production values of this show, its talented cast, great music and wildly appreciate mostly female audience, "Respect" has all the earmarks of being another hit on the order of the Gem's record-breaking "Menopause, the Musical."

But instead of clever parody songs, with "Respect" it's the real thing. The talented four-woman cast, directed by three-time Tony Award-winner Hinton Battle, provide the "soundtrack" of women's lives during the 20th century, with excerpts from more than 60 popular songs from 1900 through the 1990s.

Built around one woman's recollections of the lives of her grandmother, her mother and herself, the songs show the prominence of lyrics expressing female dependency in earlier decades and the gradual ascendance of lyrics expressing independence and self-confidence.

But even while making some points, the main note that is struck is that of joyous exuberance as four talented singers present this material, backed up by an excellent three-piece combo.

Kelly Shook serves as narrator and also a member of the ensemble of singers. She is joined by Marlyn Sanchez, Shonka Dukureh and Sarah Madej.

They are all so good at everything they do that it is impossible to single out favorites, though Sanchez' sultry rendition of "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets" will surely stick in my memory for years to come.

And Dukureh can make us look at an old-time number like "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey?" with a whole new appreciation.

The excellent three-man band of Harvey Kahl, James Simonson and Alex Trajano make up about a third of all the males in the entire theatre. This is a show that focuses on the joys and sorrows of women, and one that those who see it will probably return to see again — bringing another group of their girlfriends to experience as well.

"Respect" continues through at least April 1, with performances at 8 p.m., Wednesdays through Saturdays; 2 p.m. matinees on Thursdays and Sundays; plus a 3 p.m. matinee on Saturdays and a 5:30 p.m. show on Sundays, at the Gem Theatre, 333 Madison Ave. at Brush in downtown Detroit. For tickets, call the box office, (313) 963-9800, or Ticketmaster at (248) 645-6666 or www.ticketmaster.com.



By
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**THEATRE
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