

Majestic Theatre, West Springfield, MA

*Mamma Mia!*, music and lyrics by Benny Anderson & Bjorn Ulvaeus;  
book by Catherine Johnson. Directed by Danny Eaton. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

***“Here I go again. . .Why? Why?”***

First of all, I love “Mamma Mia!” Brilliantly done, amateurishly done, fine or mediocre, I love this show. Play me the music, sing me the songs, speak the dialogue, that is all I ask. In the new production at the Majestic Theatre in West Springfield, Massachusetts, they speak the dialogue, play the music and sing the songs. I had a good time. It was early in the run and there were problems, but nothing that can’t be solved, fixed and made better, I hope. There are enough professionals in the cast to make a difference. There is excellent talent in the design team and the director, who is the artistic director of the company, has obviously seen at least one great production of this show in the past. He has given us what the show calls for.



Marty Bongfeldt (Northampton), Cate Damon (Albany, NY),  
and Lori Efford (Holyoke); Photo: Lee Chambers

The major difficulty with this production was the sound. The balance was way off; the band was overly miked, drowning out the vocalists; the background chorus was almost inaudible. Not all the microphones worked, either, making characters strain to be heard. A couple of the voices were insecure and missed notes and occasionally lost the melodies. Still, it’s a show whose songs come from the disco era, defined that era really, and they are all so very familiar that you can sing them in your head and if the actor on

stage missed a note or a phrase, you’ve already got it in your inner ear and so you hardly miss a thing. That is the joy of this show: even if you don’t know it, you know it already.

There are eight principals: Donna Sheridan, played by Cate Damon, her daughter Sophie, played by Vivienne Damon, Donna’s friends and former back-up singers Tanya, played by Marty Bongfeldt and Rosie, played by Lori Efford; Sophie’s fiancé Sky, played by Sam Snyder, and the three men Donna slept with twenty-one years before the show begins, Sam, played by Ben Ashley, Bill, played by Gene Choquette, and Harry, played by Russell Garrett. They are the play.

All eight of the principals are fine. Vivienne Damon is wonderful; so is Sam Snyder in spite of his mike problems. Cate Damon is extremely good as is Lori Efford. Ben Ashley plays his role beautifully and Gene Choquette is funny and touching.

The chorus and small role interpreters do remarkably well; some are delightfully funny. Michael Garcia is especially fine as Father Alexandro in the wedding scene.

The show is performed on a well designed and executed set by Greg Trochlil and the costumes designed by Dawn McKay are everything they should be right down to the flippers (it's in the first act finale). Russell Garrett, who plays Harry, is also the show's choreographer and his zesty, exuberant dances come close to stopping the show they are so well done. They are helped along by the excellent lighting designed by Daniel D. Rist who, unlike so many other designers, actually knows that night looks different from daylight. Music Director Mitch Chakour gets the maximum out of his five musicians.



Sam Snyder, Vivienne Damon  
(both of New York City);  
Photo: Lee Chambers



Gene Choquette (Longmeadow),  
Ben Ashley (Southampton), Russell Garrett (Boston);  
Photo: Lee Chambers

“Mamma Mia!” with its iconic ABBA score will have you tapping your toes and wanting to sing along at almost every moment in the show. It’s hard not to when the band strikes up “Dancing Queen,” “Money, Money, Money,” “Does Your Mother Know,” “Chiquitita,” “The Winner Takes It All” and so many more. And don’t leave during the curtain call, people; you’ll miss the show’s finest, funniest moments. If you do it’ll be your own Waterloo.

+ 09/11/2022 +

Mamma Mia! plays at the Majestic Theatre, 131 Elm Street, West Springfield, MA through October 16. For information and tickets call 413-747-7797 or go on line to [www.majestictheatre.org](http://www.majestictheatre.org).