

Proctors, Schenectady, NY

Ain't Too Proud, The Life and Times of The Temptations.

Book by Dominique Morisseau. Music and Lyrics from The Legendary Motown Catalog.

Directed by Des McAnuff.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“The Way You Do The Things You Do”

Between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s a singing group out of Detroit, Michigan revolutionized pop music under a variety of names. They eventually became The Temptations and had a string of hits including the first number one single recorded by a black vocal group. One of their founders also established a black girl trio that became The Supremes. Both groups are featured in this Broadway musical history lesson in pop music.



(L–R) Harrell Holmes Jr., Jalen Harris, Elijah Ahmad Lewis, E. Clayton Cornelious, Michael Andreas; Photo: Emilio Madrid

Detroit playwright and historian Dominique Morisseau has crafted a fascinating musical book for the show, one that allows a prime member of the men’s group to act his role and also to narrate the story. Michael Andreas plays Otis Williams, this voice of history. He plays the role

extremely well, singing, dancing and acting with reality. Otis's cousin Patrick, an original founder of the first group, the Cavaliers in 1955, is played by E. Clayton Cornelious who also carries off his role with a delicate sincerity. Harrell Holmes Jr. portrays Melvin Franklin and Jalen Harris plays Eddie Kendricks, the other two original members of the group. The new lead singer who revolutionizes their sound with his high-pitched falsetto, David Ruffin, is played in this production by Elijah Ahmad Lewis. It is the shenanigans and eventual physical and emotional wreckage of this character that threatens to destroy The Temptations, but as the play shows us, they were really indestructible.

It is the music that holds this entertainment together. Thirty-one musical numbers are the highlights of this show. They include such well-loved hits as "Cloud Nine," "Don't Look Back," "Shout," "Since I lost My Baby," "For Once in My Life," and "My Girl." More than just a jukebox show, there is a special poignancy to the story of how these artists manage to stay together through all the difficulties that plague them over more than thirty years. Motown's Berry Gordy, musical genius Smokey Robinson, sexy Tammi Terrell ("Ain't No Mountain High Enough" duet with Marvin Gaye), and sensational Diana Ross all play parts in the story of this group of devoted musical men. All are well acted by this company.

Director Des McAnuff has kept this show constantly moving and even the sanguine moments present with a sense of urgency. Robert Brill's set design is as fluid as the songs and Howell Binkley's lighting design makes the most of each moment. Costumes designed by Paul Tazewell and hair and wigs by Charles G. Lapointe give the show period reality that is a great part of the show's success.

You don't have to recall all of the characters in this show to understand the play and you don't need to know all of the music either. This well-crafted, beautifully presented history lesson will move you, touch your heart and mind and leave you with a fine appreciation of the difficulties of the music business, especially for young Black singers. This touring production is a winner. What more needs to be said!



Brittney Smith, Amber Mariah Talley, Shayla Brielle G; Photo: Emilio Madrid

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Ain't Too Proud plays at Proctors Theatre, 432 State Street, Schenectady, NY through May 28. For information and tickets call 518-346-6204.