

Goodspeed Musicals, East Haddam, CT

Dreamgirls, book and lyrics by Tom Eyn, music by Henry Krieger.

Directed by Lili-Anne Brown.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“You will not be alone, we are a family.”

Promises are made, easily and musically, but they are not always kept in Henry Krieger and Tom Eyn’s fine musical, *Dreamgirls*, now on stage at Goodspeed Musicals in East Haddam, Connecticut. This show made stars of Jennifer Holliday, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Loretta Devine, Ben Harney, Cleavant Derricks, Vondie Curtis-Hall, and Obba Babatundé. This current production threatens to do the same thing for at least one of its leading players Trejah Bostic, who plays Effie Melody White, a young singer who knows her talent and believes in the good promises made to her by others she works with and trusts.



Shantel Cribbs, Ta-Tynisa Wilson, Trejah Bostic, Keirsten Hodgens;
Photo: Diane Sobolewski

The show opened on Broadway in 1981, ran for five years and was revived several times. It chronicles the rise of a black girls group, modeled on Diana Ross and the Supremes in the

1960s and 1970s. It was filmed in 2006 with Jennifer Hudson replacing Holliday as Effie. Once again the role was a stand-out star-maker. One plot point in the show deals with the departure of lead singer Deena Jones after over seven years of a major success (Diana Ross left The Supremes after eight years to pursue a solo and acting career).

The show deals with the rise of its version of Motown Records and features at least one of its other major stars whose reputation suffered as The Supremes rose to fame, James Brown, known in this show as Jimmy (Thunder) Early. He is played by Mykal Kilgore. His character is flashy, schticky, vocally extreme and both heart-warming and heart-breaking. His affair with Lorrell, one of the Dreams, reaches its natural and inevitable climax when she leaves him for her work. Kilgore does a wonderful job with Jimmy, a man we both root for and despise.



Mykal Kilgore; Photo:Diane Sobolewski



Evan Tyrone Martin, Ta-Tynisa Wilson;
Photo: Diane Sobolewski

Berry Gordy, Motown producer and star-maker, was Diana Ross's lover for five years and was the father of her daughter. In this show Curtis Taylor, Jr. represents Gordy. He is charismatic and overwhelmingly demanding of his star, Deena Jones. She is well-portrayed by Ta-Tynisa Wilson. She has the looks and the grace, although her voice seemed small the night I saw the show (possibly due to some difficulties with the sound equipment in the theater). Her loveliness was nicely matched with Evan Tyrone Martin's performance as Curtis. As he becomes more demanding and controlling she remains steadfast and resolute - she wants independence and a film career (something Gordy gave to Ross with her first two films).

The score by Krieger and Eyen reflects the subtle changes in R&B music of the 1970s. "Cadillac Car" transitions from form to form, while "Steppin' to the Bad Side" is very reflective of Motown music hits like "My Guy" and "Where Did

Our Love Go?” “We are a Family” brings this music into the show as a Broadway hit song that never leaves its own genre.

As important as Deena and Curtis are, it is the story of Effie Melody White that carries the show’s emotional plot. This is the role that the Jennifers (Holliday and Hudson) made so vital. At Goodspeed Trejah Bostic takes on the role and makes it her own. Effie rebels when her importance to the group is diminished by Curtis, who has been her lover. She is witness to his change of affection and its cost to her professionally and personally. She has the best music in the show and Bostic more than meets the demands of “And I am Telling You I’m Not Going” and “I am Changing.” When Effie gets a solo hit, “One Night Only,” which Curtis tries to take away from her, her turn-around is dynamic and so well performed by Bostic.



Trejah Bostic; Photo: Diane Sobolewski

The production is a handsome one. Arnel Sancianco’s scenic design is special and the excellent costumes by Samantha C. Jones really show the artistic growth of the Dreamgirls. Jason Lynch’s lighting design is a bit too repetitive but is effective performance light. Only the sound work, designed by Jay Hilton failed to enhance the performance. Breon Arzell’s excellent choreography brought the show to erotic life and the stage direction by Lili-Anne Brown kept the show focused every minute of the two hour and forty-five minute performance. It is a long show that flies by thanks to the creative and interpretive teams. It is the best show of Goodspeed’s season and important to see, even if only to remind us of what has come and gone in American music of the last half of the twentieth century.

+ 11/30/2023 +

Dreamgirls plays at the Goodspeed Opera House, 6 Main Street, East Haddam, CT through December 30. For information and tickets call 860.873.8668 or go to boxoffice@goodspeed.org.