

TheRep, Albany, NY

*Beautiful, the Carole King Musical*, Book by Douglas McGrath.

Songs by Carole King, Gerry Goffin Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil.

Directed by Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“Some Kind of Wonderful”*

In 1971 Carole King’s second solo LP, *Tapestry*, was issued. It was an instant hit and remained on the best-seller lists well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century after winning four Grammy Awards. It marked King as an instant success as a solo artist, something, according to the musical “Beautiful,” she never believed she could be. What people didn’t realize then, or understand even now, is how long and hard the road was to that success. The musical, now gracing the stage at theRep in Albany, New York, takes us back to her high school days in 1958, when she was just 16 years old and showcases her life, her work, and her success as a composer of pop hits from that point on.



The company of “Beautiful”; Photo: Kevin Montano

The story of “Beautiful” centers on the writing rivalry between King and her husband, Gerry Goffin with Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, friends and competitors for the number one spot on the pop charts. Working for the same publisher/producer creating hits for The Shirelles and The Platters, along with other superstars of pop music in the 1960s, the quartet’s association underwent volatile changes as did King’s marriage to Goffin. The show’s plot is driven as much



Taylor Hilt Mitchell, Nikita Burshteyn, Elizabeth Nestlerode, Shannon Rafferty; Photo:Kevin Montano

by these relationships as it is by the music performances. In thirty-five scenes spread over two acts the show gives us King's difficult decisions in life chronologically with insight and analysis. The fact that she wasn't in analysis is itself an amazing fact.



Elizabeth Nestlerode, Shannon Rafferty;  
Photo: Kevin Montano

Carole King is played with warmth and understanding by Elizabeth Nestlerode whose dark hair emphasizes King's Brooklyn Jewish heritage, one she shares with fellow superstar Barbra Streisand who, in 1971, the year *Tapestry* was issued, recorded King's song "Where You Lead," a song missing from this show. Nestlerode delivers a sensitive portrait of King, never leading the audience to tears but never denying a twinge of pain or disappointment in the composer's life.

Shannon Rafferty plays the irresolute drive of Cynthia Weil perfectly. This character wants only success and the actress puts this across every time she has a scene to play. Marriage, friendship and sex

all take a back seat in Rafferty's performance, even when Weil indulges her needs before us. As her partner in all things, Barry Mann, Taylor Hilt Mitchell gives a picture of a bi-sexual man seemingly unaware of his "other" tendencies, something Mann seems not have experienced, Mitchell's interpretation is volatily different from that of anyone else in the cast.

As Gerry Goffin, whose first hit song was written with Mann, "Who Put the Bomp," actor Nikita Burshteyn give a very compelling performance, streaked with harsh reality as he proves to be self-indulgent and abusive to King in their marriage. He looks good, sings well, and makes Goffin a remarkably honest, if dishonest, character.

David Girard is his usual, wonderful self as Donny Kirschner, the man who discovered, produced and developed the four songwriters at the center of the show



Back: Trisha Jeffrey, David Girard, Taylor Hilt Mitchell;  
Front: Shannon Rafferty Elizabeth Nestlerode;  
Photo: Kevin Montano

The entire company perform as though it was still 1964 and that is a tribute to their talents and to the supervising eye of director Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill who has made this show into an ongoing, growing slice of life. Her responses to the issues in the play shine through in the work of Nestlerode and Burshteyn whose scenes together evolve from sensitive to horrid.



Elizabeth Nestlerode; Photo: Kevin Montano

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The physical production is a beautiful one with sets by Christopher Rhoton, lighting by Travis McHale and very fine costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan. Michael Dunn, wig stylist, has done a remarkable job with this show's period and racial issues.

The two hour and twenty minute show could have gone on for at least another hour and I would have had no objections. The show is just that good. Until I saw it in Albany, I had no idea how much Carole King's songs meant to me. You may discover something

+ 07/17/2024 +

**Beautiful, The Carole King Musical** plays at theRep (Capital Repertory), 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY through August 18. For information and tickets go to [proctors.org](http://proctors.org) or call (518) 346-6204.