

Summer gets its groove on with "Shout!" musical

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"Shout! The Mod Musical" premieres Friday. It is a musical about five girls - "all different but with one thing on their minds: love" - coming of age in swinging London.

For anyone who liked the musical interludes in "Austin Powers: The Spy who Shagged Me," or for anyone who remembers the groovy '60s, with its Day-Glo lighting and fur miniskirts, the Hippodrome State Theatre has "Shout! The Mod Musical" premiering Friday at 8 p.m.

Lauren Caldwell's shows for the Hipp demand that an exclamation point be attached to the title. This is not just a musical about patent leather boots and the swim and the jerk - dance moves best reserved for a Halloween party - this is "joyous!" she says. "Fabulous!" she embellishes.

The point of the show, as explained by Caldwell, who was featured Artist of the Year by this newspaper, is that it's fun. "Joyous!" she says.

"The Hippodrome does shows during the summer that celebrate life, that celebrate generations," says Caldwell, also the theater's artistic director.

"Shout!" is a musical about five girls - "all different but with one thing on their minds: love" - coming of age in swinging London. The show starts in 1960, and takes the audience for a retrospective ride through the decade that gave us the pill, Beatlemania and Vidal Sassoon. Expect songs by Dusty Springfield, Shirley Bassey and Petula Clark.

Every dance step, every line reading is done with a side glance, and a raised eyebrow. It's a tamer version of "Hair," more in tune with Austin Powers than the Smothers Brothers. "We were shagging like bunnies," is a typical line. So is "Smashing!"

The opening song, "Downtown" (Clark's No. 1 hit from 1965) sets expectations high for the rest of the show. "I know a place where the music is fine, and the lights are bold," the five girls sing underneath giant umbrellas emblazoned with the British flag. "Downtown!"

The three-quarter stage at the Hippodrome looks nothing like you might remember in seasons past. Draped in Crayola yellows and reds from top to bottom, the stage is like something out of "Laugh-In" - a kaleidoscopic cornucopia of references and two go-go cages to boot. Are you feeling groovy yet?

One girl, here thereafter known as Orange Girl because she wears an orange trench, orange platforms and orange makeup, starts singing about her drunken husband who won't come home. The

green girl worries that she's sleeping around. The blue girl that she's not loving enough. "What color of the mod rainbow are you?" they ask "groovy, mod, fab" and sure to be audience favorite, "cosmic."

The actresses playing the girls seem to be channeling movie stars or singers from the '60s in their performances, and the show kind of challenges the audience to figure out who's who. The orange girl, played by Lauren Hathaway, is tender, quiet and domesticated, very much a Doris Day girl. The red girl, played by Jennifer Anderson, is jaunty, youthful and naive. Naturally, she's Sandra Dee. Blue girl, as played by Kelly Atkins, is Joey Heatherton, all vamp and sighs. Down to the sassy walk, the green stilettos and the cockney slang, the green girl, played by Rachel Anton, is Julie Christie, circa "Darling." Which one are you?

Atkins, who last year played the stripper in "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," says she keeps coming back to the Hipp during the summer (this is her third consecutive summer show here, "it's become my summer gig") because it's a change of pace from the rest of the year. "They're fun, lighthearted joyous shows," she said. "It's nice to have that be your job."

Mackenzie Curran, who plays yellow girl, an American Paul McCartney fanatic, says she got into the spirit of the show by looking at old Vogues (the type that have Jean Shrimpton on the cover) and mimicking the poses of the models. Anton and Hathaway watched Ed Sullivan clips of The Ronettes to get the dance moves of the time period - the jerk, the swim - just right.

In this respect, the Hippodrome should satisfy anyone in Gainesville who still craves a nostalgia trip. Dusty Springfield, Nancy Sinatra, Lulu, their songs are all name-checked and featured in the show.

Anderson, a UF graduate with three Hipp shows to her credit, sings a show-stopping rendition of "To Sir With Love" early in the show. Curran, who was also featured in "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," gets to sing Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots are Made for Walking" and "Son of a Preacher Man." The girls team up for a song celebrating a part of the female anatomy set to the tune of John Barry's James Bond theme. Yes, the show might be about the 60s, but this is as raunchy as the Hipp gets.

Anderson says the audience should be able to feel the fun the actresses are having on stage. "It's like summer camp for adults," she says. "We're just goofing around," says Curran. This atmosphere of "goofing around" is exactly what Caldwell had in mind when she selected "Shout!" as the Hipp's summer musical. She doesn't apologize for how retro the show is, or how arch. This is pure, unadulterated fun. "Fabulous!" Caldwell likes to talk in superlatives - at the end of every musical number, she says from her director's chair "Yeah!" or "You're Fabulous." Her playbill bio says she created a company called Legal Acts that trains trial attorneys for the courtroom.

For her, "Shout!" is an opportunity for people who came of age in the '60s and '70s to reminisce, to say "remember what it was like driving the car listening to..." fill in the blank with your favorite '60s musical act. By the end of the show, the decade has ended, and the girls have grown up. They're "older, but no wiser," they sing, "for in our hearts, the dream is the same." The last song is, duh, "Shout" by the Isley Brothers.

The goal was for people to let go, Caldwell says, "to allow people" from her generation "to be nostalgic, and for people who aren't familiar with the '60s to eavesdrop and listen to the music."



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From left, "Shout!" actresses Lauren Hathaway, Kelly Atkins, Mackenzie Curran, Rachel Anton and Jennifer Anderson.



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Kelly Atkins as the blue girl in Shout! at the Hippodrome Sunday, June 3, 2007.



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The cast of Shout!, from left, Lauren Hathaway, Rachel Anton, Kelly Atkins, Mackenzie Curran, and Jennifer Anderson at the Hippodrome Sunday, June 3, 2007.

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