

## Feeling Groovy

Recapturing the mod era in "Shout!"

BY CHRISTOPHER BYRNE

Philip Heckman's marvelous costumes are reason enough to see "Shout! The Mod Musical." They are a zany, quasi-satiric return to London's Carnaby Street of the 1960s, complete with Mary Quant-inspired minis, windowpane vinyl boots, a tip to Max Factor's white lipstick, and a year-by-year look at all things mod.

Happily, there's a lot more going on in this buoyant, lively, and utterly charming revue, and while you don't have to be of the vintage of such songs as "Downtown," "Son of a Preacher Man," or "Goldfinger" to be swept away by the groovy melodies to have a totally fab time, those of us who were around even peripherally will be taken by the innocence, optimism, and relative simplicity of the songs and the life as portrayed. I sang "Don't Sleep in the Subway" to my first grade classmates completely unaware of what that song was about and marginally aware that I really wanted to be Petula Clark.

The show, created by Phillip George and David Lowenstein, is a medley of songs of the 1960s presented chronologically and strung together with just enough patter to give a sense of five girls of the time—identified only by colors. The structure is intentionally reminiscent of the 1960s show "Laugh-In" with blackouts, bumps, and endearing naughtiness that seems quaint by modern standards. It's all about how the girls really grow up during the decade around the magazine "Shout!" which purports to be the arbiter of all things mod.

Cute, right? But wait, there's more. If that was all there were, this would simply be a feel-good revue of cute songs performed by amazingly talented singers. There's certainly an audience for that, but what makes this more than a conventional revue is the gentle and poignant sense of time that passing and the changes time creates that is always under the surface of every moment. It gives a bittersweet quality to the experience and a unique perspective on the time. It's a very grown-up point of view that takes nothing away from the joy of the music, but elevates it out of the too-easy avenue of nostalgia.

It's astonishing to hear how the subject matter and harmonics of the music matured over that time as young people seeking to define themselves for their time grew up, and the sense of growth and change is delicately woven through this show. One walks out humming the songs and also thinking about the social forces that created the women's movement, today's comparatively tepid and various fashions, and what's been lost or gained by a fragmented culture where the self rules versus specific, identifiable looks and attitudes that defined a generation—even for a few short years. It is this level of intelligence that George and Lowenstein have oh-so-quietly infused into this show that make it so rewarding. There is a visual and musical moment near the end, which I won't spoil for you, that puts it all into focus. Suffice it to say that change, when it comes, can be dramatic and as fomented by the baby-boomers, transformed the culture seemingly overnight.

The company is astonishing. The five women—Marie-France Arcilla, Erin Crosby, Julie Dingman Evans, Erica Schroeder, and Casey Clark, the understudy at the performance I saw—are way, way too young to have been around during the time, but they all have the spirit of the period. They make such a tight ensemble it's hard to single any one out for praise. The consistently accomplished singing, spot-on timing and the ability to add depth to a song give the evening a richness that makes it a total delight.

The scenery by David Gallo is terrific—all vinyl flowers and pink shag carpet, and the lighting by Jason Lyons captures the colors of the period without seeming foreign to contemporary eyes.

For all its apparent simplicity, the revue is not an easy form to work in. When it works as well as this does, however, it's a wonderful, carefree evening that isn't afraid of a little substance—and that's something to shout about