

***Shout!* out loud**

Revue celebrates flower power, and girl power, too.

By Jack Zink
Theater Writer
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Could this be the renaissance of women's lib? Musicals from *Mamma Mia!* to *Respect* and *The Color Purple* to *Shout!* celebrate womanhood and self discovery with all of the passion of that 20th century movement. And especially in the growing number of revues, it's played out with fun-loving comedy.

At the moment, two of those revues troll the Top 40 charts of the 1960s for hit songs made standards by the era's female performers. The newest is *Shout!*, a retrospective of British song hits interspersed with humorous and at-times poignant sketches about trying to keep up with the music's "mod" culture. It plays through July 2 at the Kravis Center before moving off-Broadway in New York in mid-July.

The other is *Beehive*, among the trendsetters of the genre. The 1986 off-Broadway revue is being revived at the Stage Door's 26th Street Theatre in Wilton Manors. This show, which follows the development of '60s "girl groups" and solo stars in America, has been extended through July 16.

Phillip George is the director and co-creator (along with David Lowenstein, who also choreographs) of *Shout!* He is familiar with *Beehive* and said he'd love to take a crack at directing it himself someday.

If he ever has time. For more than 15 years, when not developing his own shows off-Broadway or in London, he's been working with Gerard Alessandrini on the immensely successful series of *Forbidden Broadway* revues. Among the latest George directed was the tour of *Forbidden Broadway SVU* that played the Kravis last December.

"I think a lot of people put revues together, but good ones are hard to do," George said by phone shortly before *Shout!* began previews last week. "I've done so much that I'm humbled by the form. It has infinite possibilities but very few people really have cracked it."

Shout! began off-Broadway in New York in 2000. It then moved to London's Fringe (similar to off-Broadway), where George had spent the previous five years.

"I sort of learned what the British sense of humor was. I'm not going to say that I totally understand it, but it definitely informed the show," he said.

Bringing it back to the U.S. involved more than just brushing up. *Shout!* has undergone a makeover that adds a social context and gives each of the five singers an identity.

"I hate to say the word book [story] because that sounds like we jammed the songs into a constructed plot. We created a collage," he said. "When you see recurring images, after a while it accumulates meaning."

One thing the show has always had in all its versions is a sense of humor. A chuckle in his voice, George said anyone who's been paying close attention to his career might notice that *Shout!* and *Forbidden Broadway* have the same director.

"I try to do it all with wit. I give the audience permission to laugh very early in the show because I think there is something funny about a song like *Don't Sleep in the Subway, Darling*. And I think *Goldfinger* is hilarious."

The latter is a highlight of the show. It begins with an a cappella scat that merges into the James Bond theme, and finishes with a full-belt rendition of the Shirley Bassey hit.

Many songs are merely touched upon in medleys that cover the Dusty Springfield, Petula Clark, Lulu and Cilla Black songbooks. Applause and shrieks tends to follow those broken out with full treatments, from *Son of a Preacher Man* to *Those Were the Days* and *Shout!*

The song list itself differs from previous editions as well. Songs went in and out to fit the collage being built. In some cases they were chosen to more carefully fit the voices of the performers. During the workshops of recent months, about 30 songs were used and discarded. About an equal number remain.

"Not every song sounds good in every voice, for reasons I don't understand," George said. "Some girls can be completely wonderful singers but one song may not land in their voice correctly."

What evolved from the collage and the mixture of voices is a show that viewers already are saying they find moving.

"I didn't put it together that way. For me, it's a load of fun and it has heart. It just seems to speak to women especially.

"I think a lot of what people are responding to is at the end of show it says, to a lot of women, 'I can now live my days instead of counting my years, all of that stuff I went through I can now laugh at and forgive myself for', and all that in a silly revue," George said.

The director credits lead producer Victoria Lang with pushing for the show's new collage style while maintaining the original idea and still keeping the production small and intimate.

Lang brought in set designer David Gallo, who won a Tony this week for *The Drowsy Chaperone*. She also hired other big-league designers, including Philip Heckman for the show's colorful costumes.

The five girls' characters range from the submissive housewife to the flamboyant sexpot. They are identified by the color schemes of their costumes -- blue, yellow, orange, green and red. They subscribe to a popular fashion magazine, whose issues describe the trends of the day. Also, the girls write to a staid columnist who dispenses mind-numbingly irrelevant advice (a recorded voiceover by actress Carole Shelley).

"I'm a big believer in directors and creators creating for themselves," George said. "You probably should not sit in a room and say, 'This will kill them.' You should probably sit in the room and say, 'Do I love this?' And if what you love transmits to other people, that's a wonderful thing."

Just in case anyone's wondering, he still loves *Shout!* And so does his mom.

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SHOUT!

The revue, subtitled *The Mod Musical*, runs through July 2.

Where: Kravis Center Rinker Playhouse, 701 Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Beach.

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday, Sunday; 7 p.m. Sunday (except July 2).

Tickets: \$28; kravis.org, 561-832-7469, 800-572-8471.