

Tina through the times: Motif reviews Tina, the musical at PPAC

Okee dokee folks; I am from the generation that watched Ike & Tina Turner on TV and heard them on the radio back in the 60's and 70's. I also remember the comeback of Tina Turner in the early 80's. I saw the *What's Love Got to Do With It* biopic film in the early '90s and recently watched the 2021 Tina documentary. Unfortunately I never saw her in concert. When I learned about the Tina musical I figured that this would be the next best thing, and it was!

Last night, Wednesday, September 14, I was in the audience for the fourth night of the Tina musical which made its tour debut in Providence at the Providence Performing Arts Center this past Sunday. So far the crowds have been large, energetic, welcoming and overwhelmingly appreciative.

The easy thing for me to say about the show is that it's "Simply The Best," but that would be an oversimplification. The show is very good and will have you run the gamut of emotions. For some it may be tough witnessing the domestic violence of Anna Mae's (Tina) father, Floyd Richard Bullock, and her partner/husband Ike Turner or hearing a racial epithet such as when Tina is initially rejected by a record company with the utterance by the president, "no way in hell Capital is going to give this old nigger broad a deal!" Even though you may endure a couple of triggering moments, the ultimate reward is the performance and what a performance it was.

The show opens when a curtain adorned with the eyes of Tina Turner rises and Turner is standing in silhouette about to take the stairs to the stage. She then drops to the floor and begins a Buddhist chant. This scene transitions to her beginnings as the child Anna Mae Bullock, played by Ayvah Johnson, in Tennessee. This child will reappear many times throughout the show. We watch as she meets and first sings with Ike Turner, played by Garret Turner, and when she ultimately marries him. We see the evolution of the Ike & Tina Turner Revue and the downfall of their marriage and the group. Finally, we witness her resurrection as the solo artist, Tina Turner, that most are familiar with today. When posed with the issue of trying to make a record for her comeback she exclaims, "I may be jumping at the sun but I have long legs!"

This is a jukebox musical chock full of Turner hits cleverly inserted into appropriate situational portrayals of her life. Some of the songs may be placed in times before they were actually released, but that is ok, it works! Numbers from her early days right up to her mega-hits are all included— "Nutbush City Limits" all the way to "The Best" and even "We Don't Need Another Hero," from *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*.

This show rests squarely on the hit songs and the talent of the lead role. For this performance, Tina was played by Naomi Rodgers. Evidently she will be alternating performances with Zurin Villanueva who will also portray Tina. They are not understudies for each other, they have others who are.

As I said, the success of the show rests on the music as well as the talent of the lead role, and Naomi Rodgers handled it with ease and comfort. She tackled teenage Tina all the way through Turner's renaissance. Her voice was impeccable and she effortlessly emulated Turner's growl-like vocal style.

The best parts of the show are the ensemble songs when it mimicked more of a concert feel than a

musical. "I Want To Take You Higher," "Proud Mary" and "Disco Inferno" are all good examples of this. Tina's trademark dance style was channeled through all the dance routines. The one duet that worked particularly well was "Let's Stay Together" between Tina and saxophonist Raymond Hill, a bandmate with whom she'd had an affair and become pregnant with her first child, Craig.

The scenery is mostly electronic. The rear wall screen was illuminated by flashing lights, miscellaneous background scenes, and good old 60's psychedelic flashes. Physical scenery is sparse. Stage props came and went with the help of cast members and stage hands. The one piece that showed up many times was a simple door. This show focused on the music and talent.

The show ends as it began with Tina about to take the stage at a concert with the rousing closing number.

Tina clocks in with a performance time of about two hours and 30 minutes not counting the 15 minute intermission. A couple of times I felt a slight drag but it was immediately perked up by another rocking tune. Just when you think it is over they have just a little more for you, and this is the cherry on top of an already sweet cake!

Though Tina may get slapped during this show there's no touching this performance and Turner's legacy of music. It's a story of hope, escape, redemption, and success.

Tina, the musical was at Providence Performing Arts Center through Sunday, September 18. See it next time it's in town. At the end of this show my girlfriend's first words were, "I loved it, I want to see it again!"

For more about this show, go to PPACRI.org

That's it for now. Please check my other Motif offerings at: MotifRI.com/RootsReportPodcast I also have a new web link where you can find my concert photographs- MotifRI.com/FuzeksFotos. Thanks for reading. JohnFuzek.com

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