

THE ACTORS READING ROOM

REVIEW of Circle Players' *DREAMGIRLS* by Circle Players

by Jaz Dorsey

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Tonight's performance of *DREAMGIRLS* at TSU was SO sold out that they had to hold the curtain for 30 minutes to get everyone seated and then still had to turn people away. That's because this Circle Players production of the popular musical has all the elements of a crowd pleaser - great leads, fun costumes, a super band, lots of choreography, lights and costumes and a cast of 34. When you talk about "community theatre" you have to consider the community you're talking about and, let's face it, Music City is a community of folks who know what Entertaining is.

DREAM GIRLS is a story driven Motown vaudeville that tumbles from one production number to the next, stopping occasionally just long enough for the characters to juggle a smattering of dialogue that gives us a plot line, and the objective of the plot is to get us to root for Effie, who gets sidelined by the harsh realities of show biz but gets her revenge by having the best songs in the show. Christina Fentress, who was amazing in Circle's production of *THE COLOR PURPLE* is even more amazing here as Effie. She's going to walk away from this production with a serious fan base, as will David Ridley, who gets to eat some scenery as Jimmy Earl, the show's tribute to Little Richard.

Fentress and Ridley also get to shine in part because the script gives them the material to do so. The rest of the roles, as written, serve more as gears to keep the plot a plot. Given that, LaToya Gardner, Kelsey Porter, Max Desire and Elliott Robinson all ply their craft nicely and with as much nuance as the script allows and the other 28 cast members exemplify the kind of teamwork that it takes to take the audience on the ride they came to ride. Josh Waldrep has done an admirable job with his first directing gig and Ashley Danielle's choreography takes us back to the era of American Bandstand and Soul Train and is really the driving force of the show.

This show also reminds us again what an astounding organization Circle Players is, as we once again get to benefit from something that you just don't see that often in the paradigm of the American theatre - a partnership between a community theatre and a university theatre department - and, in fact, not with just one university theatre department but TWO, as we will see in their next production - *SHREK: THE MUSICAL*, produced in partnership with the theatre department at Lipscomb University.

All details regarding the remaining performances are to be found at [www,\[circleplayers.net\]\(http://www.circleplayers.net\)](http://www.circleplayers.net)

As always,

Come to Nashville and Go to the Theatre!

Jaz Dorsey

Dramaturg / The Actors Reading Room