

Metropolis' tuneful 'Beehive' sweet as cotton candy and just as filling



Jayla Williams-Craig, left, Caitlin Dobbins, Halle Bins, Christie Burgess, Bre Jacobs and Anastasia Arnold star in "Beehive: The 60's Musical" at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre. (Courtesy of Ellen Prather)



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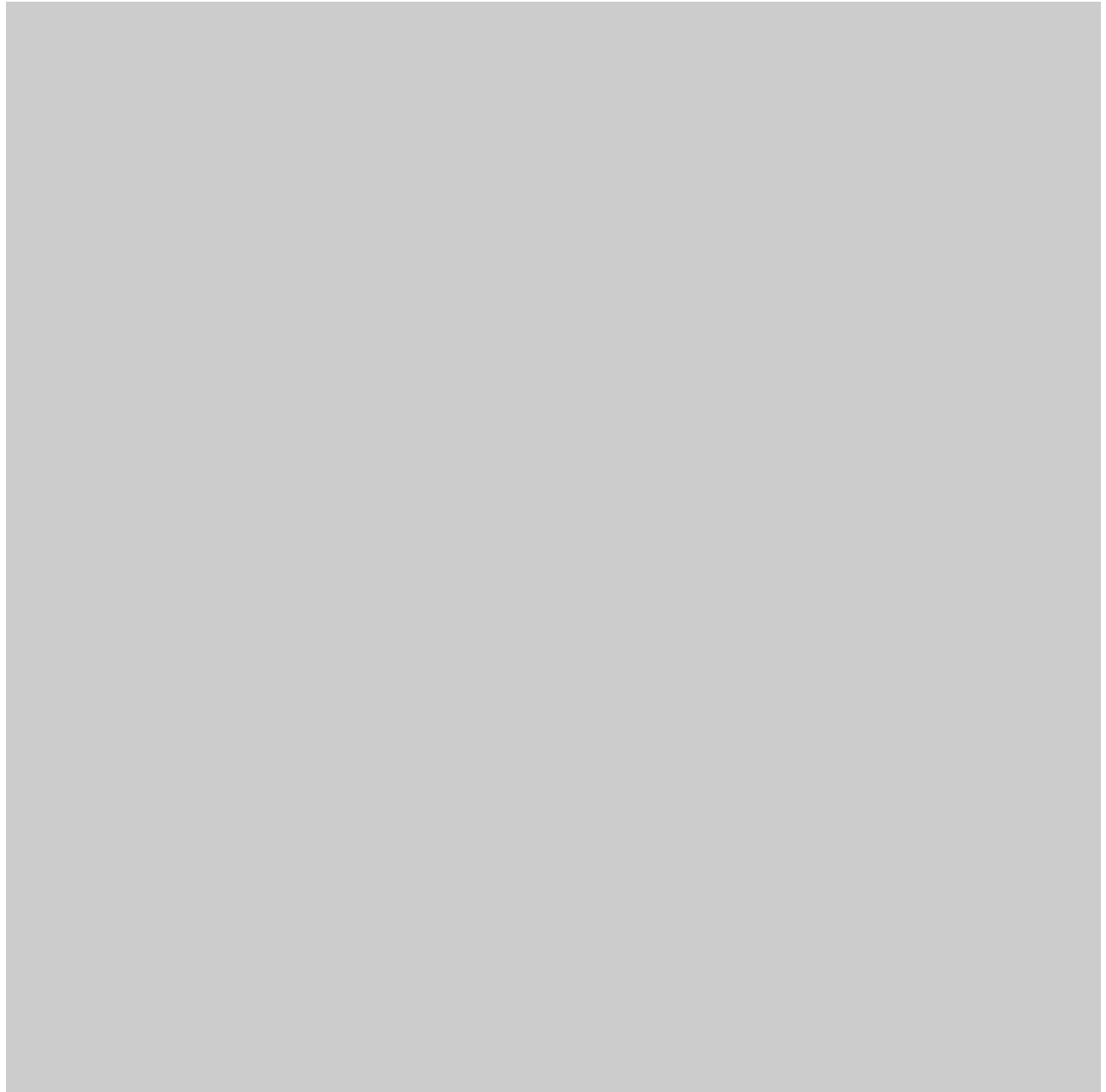
"Beehive" -- ★ ★ 1/2

If there is an ideal time for a revival of "Beehive: The 60's Musical," that time is summer.

A frothy homage to 1960s girl groups and female solo artists, the tuneful, undemanding "Beehive" features pop and R&B tunes made famous by the likes of The Ronettes, Lesley Gore, The Chiffons and The

Supremes. Created in 1985 by the late New York City booking agent Larry Gallagher, "Beehive" is as sweet as cotton candy and about as filling.

But while this jukebox tuner suits the season, it doesn't fit the current sociopolitical zeitgeist. And that's something not even Metropolis Performing Arts Centre's high-gloss revival can reconcile.



Bre Jacobs, right, takes the lead vocals during a number from Metropolis Performing Arts Centre's "Beehive: The 60's Musical" co-starring Caitlin Dobbins, left, Halle Bins, Jayla Williams-Craig, Christie Burgess and Anastasia Arnold. - Courtesy of Ellen Prather

Songs about love -- finding it, losing it and recovering it once again -- dominate the revue featuring Anastasia Arnold, Halle Bins, Christie Burgess, Caitlin Dobbins, Bre Jacobs and Jayla Williams-Craig. Director/choreographer Dina DiCostanzo's dynamic, well-rehearsed cast is accompanied by a tight, onstage septet led by music director/conductor Kenneth McMullen (keyboards) with Nick Anderson (drums), Mark Berls (bass), Paul Compton (guitar), Derek Fitting (trumpet), and David Orlicz and Miles Tesar (tenor saxophone).

There is no plot to "Beehive," which unfolds like a TV special on designer Katie Alvord-Wendling's multilevel, honeycomb-inspired set. Its fluorescent palette is reflected in Rachel S. Parent's groovy costumes, which range from thigh-high shifts to chiffon dresses to yellow, black and white honeycomb patterned outfits that complement the queens of the hive. Wig designer Dianne Sizemore also deserves mention for her sky-high bouffant hairdos.



Halle Bins channels Janis Joplin in "Beehive: The 60's Musical," running through Aug. 25 at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre in Arlington Heights. - Courtesy of Ellen Prather

The fresh-faced cast harmonizes beautifully and handily performs DiCostanzo's period choreography. But wavering pitches marred some solos and the instrumentalists occasionally overwhelmed the singers. The pacing is brisk right up until late in the second act, when an extended instrumental (necessary to cover a costume change) slowed the production to a crawl.

But Metropolis' production has its merits. Among them is Bins' nicely subdued "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" and her grand performance as Janis Joplin (she makes "Cry Baby's" anguished wails beautiful). Jacobs, Williams-Craig and Bins team up for the affecting "Abraham, Martin and John." Arnold eschews schmaltz to reveal the sentiment behind "Where the Boys Are," and Dobbins captures Tina Turner's vitality in "Proud Mary." Burgess, a strong singer, deserves mention for her sultry "Son of a Preacher Man" and impassioned "You Don't Own Me," and not just for the quality of her voice.



Christie Burgess sings lead during a number from "Beehive: The 60's Musical," a salute to girl groups running through Aug. 25 at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre. - Courtesy of Ellen Prather

The reference to sexuality in the former and independence in the latter are about as female empowered as it gets in "Beehive," which addresses only superficially such consequential 1960s events as the struggle for civil rights, the Vietnam War and the women's movement.

That was not lost on the opening night audience whose members harrumphed in response to the decidedly unironic suggestion late in the show -- as the 1960s conclude -- that "equal rights and equal pay were on the horizon."

It's a shockingly tone-deaf statement even for 1985. Yet DiCostanzo and Metropolis mitigate it in the exuberant finale set to "Make Your Own Kind of Music," featuring the visibly pregnant Burges, her belly bared.

During an era when pregnant female singers were neither seen nor heard, that may be the most empowering statement of all.

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Location: Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W. Campbell St., Arlington Heights, (847) 577-2121 or metropolisarts.com (<http://metropolisarts.com>)

Showtimes: 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 3 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday through Aug. 25

Running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes including intermission

Tickets: \$40

Parking: Street parking, nearby garage

Rating: For teens and older, some minor drug references

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