

THE MARVELOUS WONDERETTES, written and created by Roger Bean, is the opener of the 1000 Islands Playhouse's 30th Anniversary Season. The show is the latest in a long line of juke box musicals, begun in 1990 by FOREVER PLAID, a trend that unfortunately has become unstoppable. This one seems as if Mr. Bean chose an era, (as opposed to an artist or genre), picked the songs he wanted to use or those he could obtain the rights for, and then came up with a flimsy plot and two-dimensional characters to justify singing pop songs and calling it a musical.

First let me temper this by saying that both the singers and their vocal blend are excellent. Cyndi Carleton as Cindy Lou does a nice job on "Allegheny Moon" and "Son of a Preacher Man.", while Alison MacDonald as a hugely pregnant Suzy just about blasts the roof off with "Respect." As Missy, Tracy Michailidis has her most believable moment in a lovely performance of "Secret Love." The comic stand-out is Laura Caswell's rendition of "It's My Party." Miss Caswell is also a terrific dancer.

The opening numbers for each act, "Mr. Sandman" and "Heatwave" are both top notch showcases for the girls' group sound, well-coached by Musical Director Greg Gibson. He's also put together a nifty combo with himself on keyboard, Paul Barton on keyboard and guitar, and the always excellent Greg Runions on drums.

Gillian Gallow has done a nice job with the prom set, framing the stage with strips of crepe paper and overhead garlands. There's a small raised platform with a mylar rain curtain, four period mics and four nightclub-style tables for two on the floor of the house used for audience seating. Tim Fort's lighting is fine and the lighting jokes are fun. However the scenes that take place in the house are lit only by spill from the stage and are a bit hard to see. And of course, I always love a mirror ball.

Now about the costumes and wigs. I graduated from high school in 1957, so got out my old yearbook to check if my reactions were justified. Granted I'm an American, but I lived only 18 miles from the Ontario border, so it can't have been that different. No one had long hair or up-does in 1958 – it was all page-boys, either wavy or curly. Prom shoes were exclusively low-heeled pumps – no high-heeled strappy shoes. Prom dresses were mostly strapless and VERY crinolined out. As for the '68 costumes, they're much more in period, but just above the knee does not a mini make. In 1968 dresses were so short you had to practice before daring to sit down on a bus. In other words, the costumes and wigs, especially in Act I, aren't very authentic.

The choreography by Dayna Tekatch is creative, especially for the back-up singers in Act II. "Heat Wave" is particularly good. There is another period glitch, though, in "Stupid Cupid" in Act I. The twist didn't come in until the 60s.

Director Tim Fort has done a nice job of staging, but doesn't seem to have helped his cast much in terms of believable characterizations. The thin script is no help, as they're written almost as caricatures.

Playwright Bean has stuck to stereotypes even in the structure using the obligatory reunion formula, not to mention going for cheap laughs using audience participation. He obviously wasn't able to get the rights for the really good songs from the 60s – for example Burt Bacharach and the Supremes.

I guess it's obvious THE MARVELOUS WONDERETTES is not my cup of tea, primarily because of the lack of a good script and believable characters. However, the audience seemed to enjoy it, and if you like listening to a selection of period songs well sung and performed, you probably will too.

On a scale of one to five the 1000 Islands Playhouse production of THE MARVELOUS WONDERETTES gets three fish. For North Country Public Radio I'm Connie Meng.