

Theater review: 'The Marvelous Wonderettes'

[Robert Hurwitt, Chronicle Theater Critic](#)

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Courtesy of San Jose Rep

The girl group features (from left) Christina DeCicco, Holly Davis, Lowe Taylor and Bets Malone in San Jose Rep's "The Marvelous Wonderettes."



The Marvelous Wonderettes: Musical. Written and directed by Roger Bean. With Holly Davis, Christina De-Cicco, Bets Malone and Lowe Taylor. Through June 27. San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose. Two hours, five minutes. \$35-\$74. (408) 367-7255. www.sjrep.com.

Well before the high school girl group of the title takes the gymnasium stage, Roger Bean's "The Marvelous Wonderettes" has set you up for a blast from the past. "Bye Bye Love," "Rockin' Robin," "Splish Splash," "Tutti Frutti," "Peggy Sue" and other '50s classics waft from the sound system. Michael Carnahan's hearts-and-banners bedecked set is a "Dream Lover" vision for a senior prom circa 1958.

The first of two shows in San Jose Repertory's Summer Blockbuster Series, "Wonderettes" has been widely staged for much of the past decade (Sonora's Sierra Rep is also doing it this month). The version that opened Wednesday in San Jose is the original though restaged by Bean, who created it, with original choreographer Janet Miller and set, costume (Bobby Pearce) and lighting (Jeremy Pivnick) designers, as well as performers from his hit Los Angeles and off-Broadway runs.

If titles like "All I Have to Do Is Dream," "Sugartime," "It's in His Kiss" or "Mr. Sandman" spark tunes in your brain - or a jilted woman snapping, "It's my party," makes you laugh in anticipation - you're in the target demographic (though if you are, you'll probably wonder why these small-town kids are doing the Twist, in Miller's otherwise choice period choreography). Even if you're not, this is a sweet confection with just enough of a comic edge to keep it from cloying.

It's a two-part revue, moving from the Springfield High (is there a state without one?) senior prom to the class of '58's 10th reunion, thereby allowing Bean to sample the girl-group riches of the '60s in the second act. What keeps it interesting is the way Bean builds little stories from juxtaposed songs and his enchanting cast invests the stock characters with personality.

Tall, bespectacled Missy (Lowe Taylor, who's played all four roles) is the wallflower-type organizer, who calls out dance steps, made the cotton-candy dresses and has a crush on their faculty coach (cue "Secret Love," "Mr. Lee" and "Born Too Late"). Class cutup Betty Jean (Holly Davis) discovers her cheating boyfriend ("Lipstick on Your Collar") has been targeted by her best friend, a sleek Christina DeCicco as the sexy school flirt Cindy Lou ("Lucky Lips").

Silly, ditzzy Suzy (a standout Bets Malone, who originated the role), sticks her gum on the mike each time she solos, and is in love ("Stupid Cupid"). The way her nervous nasal giggle transforms into the helpless sob of advanced pregnancy is priceless.

All is resolved at the reunion. We catch up on one life through "That's When the Tears Start" and "It's My Party" and another with "Son of a Preacher Man" and "Leader of the Pack." Fulfillment comes for one with a segue from "Wedding Bell Blues" to "With This Ring" (no "Chapel of Love"?) and for another with a dynamic blend of "Rescue Me" and "Respect."

Musical director Dolores Duran-Cefalu's four-piece band handles the songs expertly. The singers are engaging and resourceful. It's trite. It's saccharin. But it's fun.

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