

THEATER

Golden 'Dreamgirls' comes up a little short on glitter

"Dreamgirls" continues at the Detroit Opera House, 1525 Broadway, downtown Detroit, through Sunday, March 22. Performances 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m. Sunday, matinees 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. Tickets \$24-\$49, on sale at all Ticketmaster outlets, the Fisher Theatre and the Opera House box office. To charge by phone, call (248) 645-6666. BY KELLY WYGINIK STAFF WRITER

The March 3 opening night performance of "Dreamgirls" was a lot like show biz — lots of ups and downs.

Overall entertaining, there are some wrinkles that need ironing out before this Tony, Grammy Award-winning musical, based on Motown's Supremes, returns to Broadway.

Line fumbles in the first act can be excused to opening night jitters, but not slow pacing. Inappropriate giggles near the end of Act 2, and quick glances at watches, were signs of an audience anxious to leave the "girls" for "Dreamland."

Pacing was also a problem for the orchestra, which often lagged behind performers on stage by a measure or two. Not only did the music drag, but it was sometimes too loud and brassy, not at all what Motown is supposed to be.



Posed for stardom: Kimberly Jujan (left to right), La Tanya Hall, and Tonya Dixon in a scene from the national tour of "Dreamgirls."

That's not to say there's not a lot to like about "Dreamgirls," which received a standing ovation opening night.

With music by Henry Krieger, book and lyrics by Tom Eyer, "Dreamgirls" opened on Broadway in 1981, making history

with its Motown sounds and simple set design relying on costumes to define time period. Four metal towers, moved about the stage for various scenes, suggest everything from backstage to recording studio. There is no other scenery, just colored backdrops, and a few pieces of furniture.

Tony Stevens, director and choreographer, recreates the original staging by the late Michael Bennett of "A Chorus Line" fame, and reunites the team of scenic designer Robin Wagner. Costumes by Theoni V. Aldredge are authentic 1960/

1970s. Lighting is by Sharon Musser.

B.J. Crosby, Tonya Dixon and La Tanya Hall are believable as the "Dreamettes" Effie Melody White, Lorrell Robinson and Deena Jones, singers from Chicago determined to win a talent contest at The Apollo Theatre. They lose but win a contract to tour as backup singers with the soulful James "Jimmy" Thunder Early (Kevin-Anthony). Effie's brother C.C. White (Gary E. Vincent) writes a hit song for James, and with guidance from manager Curtis Taylor Jr. (Brian Evart Chandler) the girls are on their way to making "Dreams" come true.

"You could be a star, but you've got to trust me," says Curtis, and the girls do. He makes the American dream come true for the Dreamettes, whom he renames "The Dreams," and Jimmy, too, taking R&B to the pop charts, breaking racial barriers in the process.

Heartbreak and pain are part of the price they pay, but in between, there's a lot of great music and dancing. Fame changes all of the characters requiring them to be good entertainers, and good actors. Everyone in the cast meets this challenge, but there are some standouts.

La Tanya Hall evolves from the school teacher her mother wants her to be, to glamorous superstar. It's hard not to think of Diana Ross and the Supremes when Hall sings "Hard to Say Goodbye, My Love." The similarities between that scene, and Ross' "Never Can Say Goodbye," are striking.

Crosby, steals the show more than once as Effie. Even though she's upstaged by the others, pushed from lead to back-up singer, and eventually fired, she's truly the star of this show. Effie is funny, she wins our sympathy, and her strong voice, commands attention, especially "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going."

Jimmy's got to have soul, and there isn't any in the 1970s. Curtis cuts him loose. You can't "Fake Your Way to the Top," and Kevin-Anthony shows he's a great performer and actor as he changes from superstar to has-been.

Michael Goddard, who is staying with his sister and her family in Birmingham during the run of the show, appears as Frank, the press agent. Although it's not a major part, Frank plays a pivotal role in getting "The Dreams" press they need. Goddard is believable as Frank, and plays a solid supporting role.

Company formed to organize a classical music station

By FRANK PROVENZANO STAFF WRITER

Every Friday, former WQRS-FM host Dick Wallace would play Dvorak's "Carnival Overture." It was a popular weekly rite of passage to kick off the weekend for the station's classical music listeners.

After an unceremonious and controversial change in format in November, however, that kind of on-air conviviality has been silenced.

But former WQRS listeners haven't stopped hoping for a revival.

And now, there are signs that it might be time to strike up a band, revive the orchestra and recall those virtuosos in waiting. Setting the dial, however, will have to wait.

With the formation of the Detroit Classical Radio Corp. in mid-February, the legal and organizational structure has been put in place to eventually operate a full-time classical music station.

Board members' estimates range from three months to one

What: Detroit Classical Radio Corp.

Purpose: To establish a full-time classical music format in the metro Detroit radio market. Projection: Three months to one year before a new classical music station debuts.

For information: Call Dick Wallace, (313) 965-8600 or Maria Marcantonio, (248) 348-9735.

year before a new classical music format will debut in metro Detroit.

Currently, four stations have entered into tentative talks with the Detroit Classical Radio Corp., a non-profit with a three-member board and one full-time employee, longtime on-air talent Wallace.

"Nine out of ten who call are people volunteering, from stuffing envelopes to offering legal services," said Wallace, who also hosts a pops music program on WYUR-AM (1310) 6:30 p.m. Sundays.

Basically, the Detroit Classical

Radio Corp.'s idea is to convince a current radio station to switch its current format to a classical music format.

In essence, Detroit Classical Radio Corp. would pay a leasing fee to the station's owner, and handle the day-to-day operations, from programming to promotions.

The lease-management agreement isn't an unproven arrangement in the local market. Currently, WYUR leases the 1310 AM frequency from WNIC, which formerly operated a Motown Gold format in its place.

"(WYUR) has built a station from the ground up," said Wallace. "Many of their listeners left WJR when (that station) went after a younger audience."

There is no full-time classical music station based in metro Detroit. Windsor's CBC-FM (89.9) is the only classical format in the market.

Other stations, such as WDET-FM (101.1), WDET (90.9) and WUOM-FM (91.7) broadcast classical music programs.

While the classical music for-

mat doesn't bring in high revenue compared to more popular formats, it typically operates with lower expenses, said Wallace.

Greater Media, which holds the license for the 105.1-FM frequency, bought WQRS last year for a reported \$30 million. The format was changed to hard rock and renamed, "The Edge."

It wasn't a case of WQRS losing money, said Wallace. Rather the station wasn't making enough profit to cover the payments on the debt to purchase the station.

Over the years, noted Wallace, WQRS had one of the highest TSL (time spent listening) ratings in the market. WQRS listeners were considered an advertiser's dream; upwardly mobile with plenty of disposable income. Not only can the net profit of a classical format be higher rela-

tive to other stations, said Wallace, but the Detroit Classical Radio Corp. has assembled an experienced sales, administrative and on-air staff ready to step in and pick up where the WQRS left off.

According to Wallace, revenue generated by the Detroit Classical Radio Corp. would cover operating expenses with any remaining net profits possibly shared among local art groups.

The pressing issue, however, seems to be whether a radio station could make more money leasing or operating the station themselves.

Detroit Classical Radio Corp. and its supporters are optimistic.

"We're looking at a long-term limited management agreement of at least five years," said Wallace. "That's necessary to protect the format."

One of the highest rated classical music stations in the country, KING in Seattle, has successfully set up a non-profit corporation to protect its format, said Wallace.

Any profits from KING are divided among the Seattle Symphony, the regional opera company and area art groups.

"This has become a passionate cause," said Wallace. "We all knew WQRS listeners were loyal, but we didn't realize how loyal."

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