THE DRIFTERS GIRL

Grand Opera House Belfast Thur 8th Feb 2024

The Drifter’s Girl by Ed Curtis comes to GOH Belfast as part of its major UK and Ireland tour. Nominated for Best New Musical at the 2022 Olivier Awards it is packed full of iconic Drifters hits. Based on an idea by Tina Treadwell, it tells the story of Faye Treadwell, the group’s legendary manager from the highs of hits to the lows of legal battles and personal tragedy.

The show duration is two hours and twenty five minutes, including an interval between Act 1 and Act 2. Please try to be seated at least ten minutes before the show begins as these programme notes will be read aloud via your headsets. If you experience problems with your headsets please do not hesitate to let a member of the Opera House staff know.

There are only six actors in the show, four black men who cover various roles, including those of women and two black female actors each playing only one role, Faye Treadwell and her daughter who is only referred to as “girl” or “kiddo” throughout.

Characters and Costumes:

Carly Mercedes Dyer: Faye Treadwell, 2nd wife of George Treadwell becomes the manager of The Drifters. She has black curly shoulder length hair which she wears up, with a heart shaped face, wide brown eyes and a full mouth. Tall with a womanly figure and shapely legs she generally wears cream fitted knee length dresses, or light coloured suits with short jackets, gloves, a pill box hat, handbag and small heeled shoes. When we first meet her she wears an ankle length coat with fur collar, a wide brimmed hat and a large square handbag. In England she wears a full length fur coat, and at the end of the show she wears a chiffon sleeveless evening gown with a high waist.

She has a strong determined character which makes her seem like a hard-nosed business woman. She cares deeply for those around her, but as a black woman in a man’s world, which is, in itself, deeply racist, she is prepared to fight for her rights, her family, and those of the band.

Jaydah Bell-Ricketts: daughter of Faye and George Treadwell is only referred to as “girl”, “Kiddo” and Faye sings a song about her called “Harlem Child”. She is tall and slim with black curly hair tied back or put up. She is pretty with brown eyes and a wide happy smile. She wears typical 60’s style printed knee-length cotton dresses with collars, short sleeves and fitted at the waist with a full skirt. Other times she wears a fitted cream knee length dress and at the end of the show she wears a knee length fitted dress in cream.

She is a quiet thoughtful young woman who longs to be with her mum but realises she comes 2nd to the band. She forces her mother to relate things which her mum would rather not discuss.

Mike Antony Daley: George Treadwell and husband to Faye. He also covers other roles. He is tall and muscular with short back wavy hair. He has a high forehead, dark brown eyes, a thin moustache and full lips. As George he wears a fedora hat, a dark fitted suit with loose trousers, a white shirt and tie and shiny shoes. As a member of The Drifters he will wear the same outfit as the others in the band.

Ashford Campbell: Ben E King, Rudy Lewis and others. He is very handsome with short black wavy hair and twinkling light brown eyes in a sculptured face. He has a thin moustache. All the band members dress alike in dark suits with loose fitting trousers, (sometimes with braces) white shirts and ties. They also wear satin jackets in shimmering blues or golds, and tapestry fabric suits, and later on they wear tan coloured suits with bell-bottomed trousers.

Daniel Haswell: Johnny Moore, Gerhart Thrasher and others. He has a round serious face with black hair pulled back and threaded in sections to reveal his scalp. His brown eyes are unsmiling and his lips are full. He dresses in the same manner as the other band members.

Tarik Frimpong: Clyde McPhatter, Lover Patterson and others. His hair is black and wavy. He has a high smooth forehead, a thin face with high cheekbones, dark brown eyes and a thin moustache above a wide mouth. He is tall and lithe. As Lover Patterson he wears a white shirt open at the neck, loose jackets and wide trousers, he is seldom seen without a cigarette. He moves in a slinky suggestive way and is very “touchy, feely” as he likes having his way with the ladies. As a member of the band he dress in like manner.

As there are only six actors in the entire show the four men will cover many roles, including those of hotel receptionists and waitresses. Character changes can be indicated by a mere turning of a body and changing voices or accents, a bow on a headband or an apron may be the only costume change, or in other instances the removal or donning of a jacket or hat.

The actors may differ on the night of the show in Belfast, but they will look similar and dress in the same costumes.

The Set

The floor of the stage comprises of squares that are lit up around the edges, it also doubles as pavement in outdoor scenes. There are rectangular panels that decrease in size towards the back of the stage. Along the edges of the panels are thin strips of light. There is a rust coloured geometric brick effect design on the panels, which slide like blinds. When fully opened they reveal the entire stage, and at other times they narrow our view, focusing our attention on the action taking place.

The back wall of the stage changes when The Drifters are performing at various venues. Sometimes it has wide stripes of pastel coloured lights and at other times it has a 60’s type circles and shapes that change colour, whilst other times it is geometric shapes of triangles or art deco style designs in green and orange.

The Alabam where Faye first meets Nat King Cole and George Treadwell is a dimly lit club which has two metal-runged stools and a bar counter suggested by a line of light. Later there is an outdoor scene with a tree whose branches reflect moonlight. George’s office has a table and chair, and a recording studio is suggested by a technician who presses virtual buttons and the band wearing earphones.

There are not a lot of props used in the show. It begins with a jukebox which is wheeled off and which we don’t see again. The band use microphones which they spin and turn as part of their act and in act two they will become hotel counters. They carry old fashioned cardboard suitcases when moving from place to place.

Lighting is used to good effect, especially in the background when the band performs. Dry ice is used to give a smoky or dreamy effect at times throughout the show. Names of towns and cities are flashed against the background, illustrating a whirlwind tour of England, Scotland and Wales as Faye tries to generate cash in order to fight a law suit back home in USA. Posters proclaiming “No Blacks”, No Irish” and “No Dogs” appear illustrating the racism faced by certain groups of people at that time. Newspaper headlines are projected showing us how the case is progressing and the public interest in the case.

The music is played live and covers all the best loved and well known songs of The Drifters. At the end of the show following the bows of the actors there will be a further medley of popular hits by The Drifters, so if you wish to hear a little more music please stay seated.