



BABY, IT'S BLAND!: (left to right) Crystal Starr, Christina Sajous, Tony nominee Beth Leavel, Erica Ash, & Kyra Da Costa in jukebox show masquerading as a musical about The Shirelles, *Baby It's You!* Photo: Ari Mintz

Theater Review

Baby It's You!:

K-Tel does The Shirelles, etc.



BABY IT'S YOU!

Conceived by Floyd Mutrux

Book by Floyd Mutrux & Colin Escott

Directed by Floyd Mutrux & Sheldon Epps

Broadhurst Theatre

235 West 44th Street

(212-239-6200), www.BabyItsYouOnBroadway.com

By David NouNou

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were record companies (for those of you who remember vinyl records) by the name of K-Tel and Ronco Records that produced record album compilations. What they did was take about 20 popular songs of the day and made covers of them (not using the original artists), or used tiny snippets of the original artists' songs and put them on one record. If you were stupid enough to have bought a couple of those albums, like I was, bringing them home with anticipation, gently taking them out of their covers, putting them on the record player, and then discovering to your chagrin that you were listening to 45-second snippets of covers or original versions of Top 40 hits, you felt cheated and ripped off. Well, this is basically what is in store for you with the new, ill-conceived jukebox show (I cannot even call it a musical) *Baby It's You!* A hodgepodge blend of snippets of about 35 songs strung together in the name of a musical. Like those old K-Tel records, quantity does not pass off for quality.

In *Dreamgirls* (an original musical) based on The Supremes, and *Jersey Boys* (an excellent jukebox musical) based on The Four Seasons, the shows' storylines traced the rise of those groups. You learned something about them and their music.

In *Baby It's You!*, the show features some of the songs of The Shirelles, omitting their most popular song due to, perhaps, copyright problems: "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow." You know nothing about the girls, and what brought them together, other than a dissatisfied Jewish-American housewife, Florence Greenberg (Beth Leavel) from Passaic, New Jersey. Mrs. Greenberg is bored with her humdrum married life, and decides she needs to work and get in the record business because she hears a lot of songs all day long and knows what makes a hit. So she leaves her husband and children and moves out of Passaic with the girls, comes to New York, and starts her second record label, Scepter Records, with her main attraction, The Shirelles.

In *Baby It's You*, The Shirelles are a marginal part of the story; the main focus is on Florence Greenberg and her rise as the only woman music producer in a male-dominated field, as well as her romance with African-American artist, Luther Dixon, her song writer and co-producer (Allan Louis). If anything, Scepter Records should have been the main attraction of the show. For a small, independent company, besides The Shirelles, it had Chuck Jackson, early Dionne Warwick, Isley Brothers, The Kingsman, and more. It would have made more sense to make the musical about the company, the love and labor that brought it to fruition, the intrigue behind the scenes, and the gallery of their artists and the songs that were generated. Instead, we see the girls who comprise The Shirelles enacting other roles. As an example, Erica Ash who is Micki, one of the singers of the group in Act II, doubles up as Dionne Warwick. Lesley Gore (Kelli Barrett) appears out of nowhere, as do the Kingsman, with Brandon Uranowitz (who also plays two other roles) singing "Louie, Louie." By the middle of Act II, when all these different artists come on and off, you give up trying to make any sense of this mess. Yes, it is that sort of a mishmash, thrown up in the air, with the hope of something that might come down and stick.

In show business, in order for a performer to succeed, he or she has to be a triple threat: act, sing and dance. The triple threat here is none other than Floyd Mutrux (the man who gave us the delightful *Million Dollar Quartet*). He doesn't act, dance or sing here; instead, he conceived, wrote the book, and directed the show. He mucked up his triple threat here big time. The onus of this fiasco lies flatly on his shoulders. Since Mr. Mutrux enjoys jukebox musical shows, one wonders if his next project might be entitled *Sincerely* or *Sugartime* about The McGuire Sisters. They had a more formidable and longer-lasting career than The Shirelles, with a huge record catalog. Also there would be more drama: Phyllis McGuire, the pretty one of the trio, was involved with crime boss Sam Giancana. Wow, just think of the possibilities.

Beth Leavel as Florence Greenberg gives the character all the flair she can muster from the lame dialogue she is given. She has a powerful voice but it is used in some of the worst musical settings. Believe me, she earned her Tony nomination for Best Actress in a Musical under the hardest of conditions. That being said, she has no coherent material to work with here.

2011 had its share of great shows and musicals, but it also had some of the worst musicals in years. As we are nearing the Tony Awards, theater critics have had to sit through four of the worst musicals in some time: *Baby It's You!*; *The People in The Picture* (albeit that one had a serious, genuine storyline about a Holocaust survivor that did not work as a musical); the dreadful musical adaptation of the Pedro Almodovar film *Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown*; and *Wonderland*. Although a dubious distinction, a special Tony should be given by the critics who panned all these musicals. And the Tony Award for the Worst Musical of 2011 goes to...?

Published May 12, 2011

Reviewed at performance on May 11, 2011

Editor's Note: www.StageZine.com, celebrating our 1-Year Anniversary on the Internet. We want to express our gratitude to all the theater PR professionals, industry organizations, and, most of all, our readers, followers and fans for their continued support and kind words throughout the past year, helping make www.StageZine.com a success.

Copyright © May 12, 2011, StageZine.com

www.StageZine.com, celebrating our 1-Year Anniversary on the Internet

