

## 'The Marvelous Wonderettes' at Montgomery Playhouse by Amanda Gunther

Amanda  
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Go Chipmunks! It's 1958 and it's the night of the Super Senior Prom at Springfield High School! The Crooning Crabcakes have been banned from performing at the dance because their lead singer got suspended from school for being a butthead. So it's up to four fabulous friends, in their puffy crinoline and lace prom dresses to provide the entertainment for the evening. ★★★★★

Directed by Roxanne Fournier Stone and Stacey Fearheiley, The Montgomery Playhouse presents a charming musical that will inspire that fun-loving high school feeling of the fifties for audiences of all ages.



(l to r) At The Senior Prom of 1958- The Marvelous Wonderettes: Suzy (Melanie Kurstin), Missy (Christine Pash), Cindy Lou (Katie Mays Reedy), and Betty Jean (Amanda Spellman). Photo by Steve Deming.

Hats off to Costume Designer Donna Meester who transports the audience back to the Springfield High School gymnasium circa 1958 via her fabulous glitter gowns of yesteryore. Four fantastic frocks come to luminous life in shades of orange-peach, baby pink, sky blue, and spring green, mounted over with lace and under with crinoline, and topped with glitter. The dazzling dolls really sparkle with their terrific threads. Meester waves her magic wand and transforms these dated era appropriate gowns into their matching shorter counter parts for the ten-year reunion in act two, keeping the color scheme the same, only now the much shorter dresses are covered in sequins from their cinched waist belts on upward and have matching huge hoop earrings to accessorize. Meester makes marvelous magic with these costume choices, the best element of the entire production.

The show ends up being a promising venture of intrigue that ultimately becomes a disappointment by the time you reach Act II. Starting off with this wonderful energy and bright spirits around the four girls are giddy and eager, really involving their bodies in their dances, smiling and trying to put on a fantastic show in the first half. They create

perfectly balanced harmonies, sing loudly and clearly and even get the audience engaged for a brief period of time. But after intermission it felt as if they decided to phone in their performances. With lack-luster half smiles, little to no effort in their dancing, and intonation issues as well as vocal projection issues; the second act was a major let down.

Musical Director Jil Marie Luyk had a division of focus in her song work with the girls. The first half provided stunning sweet numbers that were catchy and energetic. The second half of the show – even providing more upbeat musical style and numbers in the song selections – was deflated as if the intermission had sucked the energy and the wind right out of the performers.

Suzy (Melanie Kurstin) has a fun energy in the first act, doowoping along as backup vocals in numbers like “Allegheny Moon.” Her performance in the second act is the most disappointing as she is given two huge numbers, “Rescue Me” and “Respect” and both come out sounding mousy and small rather than the burgeoning explosion of sound that the audience recognizes from these two tunes.

The leader of the four, Cindy Lou (Katie Mays Reedy) provides us with that sweet girl image with an even sweeter voice to match. Reedy has a sassy fun number in the first act, “Lucky Lips” that gives her a chance to defy the stereotype of goody-two shoes for just a moment in time. And Reedy is the only one to bring emotion to the second half with her. While her vocal sound goes from perfect pitch and clarity to slightly flat and strained, she does pack a wallop of sorrow into “Leader of the Pack” and “Maybe.”

The meekly mannered and shy young thing is found in Missy (Christine Pash). Wearing the color-coordinated horn-rimmed glasses, she is mostly quiet, tries to keep the peace among her quarreling friends and then shocks the audience with her operatic voice. She is best heard giving her siren’s belt when singing back-up or in the group numbers; her sound easily distinguishable above the others. And she is an all-eyes actor, providing a great deal of her characters details and emotions through her very expressive peepers.

Larger than life Betty Jean (Amanda Spellman) boasts a boisterous personality that borders on obnoxious. Creating the comic relief in the show, constantly bucking heads against Cindy Lou, and desperately driving to showcase her diva personality, Spellman creates a corny but comical character that helps drive through the performance. Her shenanigans of constantly trying to steal the spotlight from Reedy in the first half are hilarious and make for an entertaining act I. And while her singing voice becomes more of an angry shouting voice in “Lipstick On Your Collar” it imports a great sense of her hellacious fury over her cheating beau.

Running Time: 2 hours with one 15-minute intermission.



(l to r) At their 10 Year Class reunion in 1968- The Marvelous Wonderettes: Missy (Christine Pash), Cindy Lou (Katie Mays Reedy), Suzy (Melanie Kurstin), and Betty Jean (Amanda Spellman). Photo by Steve Deming.

*The Marvelous Wonderettes* plays through October 21, 2012 at The Arts Barn – 311 Kent Square Road, in Gaithersburg, MD. For tickets, call the box office at (301) 258-6394, or purchase them [online](#).

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