

“Welcome to the ’60s”

Swinging through a decade of hits in Greenwich Village!

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“Welcome to the ’60s” So Hot It’s Way Cool!

The temperature in Vero Beach tied a record 97 degrees on a recent Sunday and it's likely that some of the sizzling heat was due to the red-hot show "Welcome to the '60s" being performed by Theatre-Go-Round Dinner Theatre at the Quilted Giraffe Restaurant.

Truth be told, this musical revue which recaptures the very best of the hits of the '60s was fast-paced and hot, but it was also way "cool" and "groovy" in a hip style that perfectly recalled a decade that began with the election of a charismatic young president, was torn asunder by a controversial Vietnam war, assassinations and seismic societal shifts and ended with a now-legendary Woodstock music festival and a walk on the moon.

Wowwee-Kazowee, what a decade! And there is, perhaps no better way to remember the "vibe" of that transformational decade than through its music. To that end, TGR artistic director Jon Putzke and cast members Gregory Harris, Shamara Turner and Beth McKenzie-Shestak took a capacity audience on a wondrously magical musical mystery tour following a delicious three-course gourmet meal.

Putzke, the mastermind behind TGR show concepts and creations, has spent his entire professional career in the theatre and his genius for knowing how to assemble just the right combination of songs and singer-dancers is indeed formidable.

Apparently, local audiences appreciate Putzke's entertainment prowess even during the off season's "Dog Days of Summer" because this night there was barely enough room left among tables of guests for the performers themselves.

"It's summer and we're packing them in. It's wonderful and this really has been a fun, fun show and they (performers) have such a nice blend of voices," Putzke said prior to the evening's 20-plus song show.

To kick-off a year-long schedule which began in May, Putzke decided to unite five separate shows with a base built around a New York City theme. This show features '60s era song hits that rocked the musical Mecca of trendy, bohemian Greenwich Village. A new show "Between the Moon and New York City" set to debut on Oct. 11 will celebrate the cabaret life and times of Peter Allen.

TGR musical director Harris (who teaches music at Vero Beach High School) served as the evening's host along with performing duties and offered interesting factoids and insights into the music and musicians who got their start in Greenwich Village in the '60s.

The rich harmonies of Harris, Turner and McKenzie-Shestak would have made Crosby, Stills & Nash proud. Songs including the Fifth Dimension's "Aquarius," Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit," the Mamas and the Papas' "California Dreamin'" and others were enjoyed by audience members including those who recalled their youth and sang along to songs made famous 50 years ago.

Turner's solo of Aretha Franklin's classic hit "Respect" proved that the Vero Beach area has its own "Queen of Soul" while McKenzie-Shestak's powerful lead on "White Rabbit" channeled Grace Slick and the psychedelic sound of drug-inspired lyrics and music.

What a trip! And the fun and music just kept rolling along as patrons took to the dance floor with the performers to the tune of Little Eva's "The Loco-Motion." One sprightly septuagenarian joined the conga-like line snaking around tightly packed tables and successfully tested a recent knee replacement.

Perhaps that musically inspired and joyful inhibition is the heart and soul of what makes all TGR shows so much fun. For a time, people of any age can come and get lost in the music - the music of their youth or just the very best of what has been written in modern times. Aches, pains and the cares of everyday life just fall away as the sound and scene envelopes attendees with pure enjoyment.

Those who recall the '60s will likely remember the irresistible yellow "smiley" faces that have now popularly returned as techie emoticons. There was a room full of living, breathing smiley faces a la '60s style seen during this show - including this reviewer's.

"Welcome to the '60s" performs on Sundays July 19, Aug. 9 & 23 and Sept. 20. Twilight dinner is served at 4:30 p.m. with the show beginning at 6 p.m.

Dinner theatre packages include a three-course gourmet dinner, the show, tax and gratuity for \$55 per person. Full table side bar service is available throughout the evening. Reservations are required by credit card by phoning the Theatre-Go-Round box office at 772-252-9341. Visit online at www.theatregorounddinnertheatre.com.

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