

# Review: BEAUTIFUL, THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL at Omaha Community Playhouse is Some Kind of Wonderful

[Christine Swerczek](#)

BEAUTIFUL, The [Carole King](#) Musical previewed at the Omaha Community Playhouse September 14th. Making its Broadway debut in 2014, BEAUTIFUL was nominated for an array of theater awards, winning several including Best Musical Theater Album and a Grammy Award. No surprises there. With words and music by [Gerry Goffin](#) and [Carole King](#) along with [Barry Mann](#) and [Cynthia Weil](#), this jukebox musical is a musical gift. The book crafted by [Douglas McGrath](#) manages to inject warmth, humor and insight into the lives of [Carole King](#) and her co-songwriter husband, [Gerry Goffin](#). It isn't surprising there, either, knowing McGrath's impressive works are littered with awards. McGrath even wrote for "Saturday Night Live."

Having seen the musical on Broadway, I knew it was a winner. But how would a community theatre in Omaha pull it

off? Incredibly well! I absolutely loved every minute and would gladly see it again. Everything works: the direction, the cast, the musicians, the set, the lighting, the choreography...everything is near perfection.

Especially Ginger Johnson, a newcomer to Omaha who is such a delight that she could easily put on a one woman show and fill the house. It isn't just her vocals, though, that range from soft and melodious to strong and sure; it's her on-stage personality. Her portrayal of Carole is subtle, humble and completely likable. I had the sense that she knew Carole. She captures her insecurity which develops into the confidence to perform at [Carnegie Hall](#). She makes us feel her love for Gerry, even when he loses her trust. Her vulnerability is palpable.

[James Verderamo](#) as [Gerry Goffin](#) shows off his quality vocal chops and is convincing as the talented songwriter, but angst ridden, cheating husband who still elicits sympathy because he is so tormented.

Maddy Stark ([Cynthia Weil](#)) and Laurence Katz ([Barry Mann](#)) round out the fabulous four songwriters with a sense of fun. Their back and forth relationship sparks interest. Their voices are both pleasing and suited to their characters.

While the cast is packed with incredibly gifted singers, there are two that stand out with their power vocals. Tyler Marshal

(Drifter) and Monica Weber (Shirelle) earn thunderous applause with their solos.

Even those without singing parts are some kind of wonderful. Kevin Olsen (Don Kirschner) and [Connie Lee](#) (Genie Klein) add dimension to the story with their humorous and authentic deliveries.

Jim Othuse's set design is simplistic and multi-functional. The fanlike backdrop topped with music notes remains stationary while staff lines lift and lower, changing color. The lighting by Josh Wrobleski is especially effective in creating mood. I was constantly fascinated by the color combinations and the way they made me feel. The set and lighting are proof that set design doesn't have to be overly complicated to be great.

Choreographer Melanie Epps and Costume Designer Lindsay Pape get it right with both the dance moves and the clothing of that time period. Several of the dresses could have come straight out of my closet in the late 1960s-70s. The dance moves are entertaining and accurate for that period as well.

As far as sound, Jim Boggess is his usual musical genius as Music Director and I have to add that I didn't miss a single word of this show, probably due to Sound Designer Tim Burkhart. This whole production depends on sound and the

sound in the Omaha Community Playhouse is Beautiful!

Kudos to Stephen Santa for his superb direction and the fabulous cast and crew. I loved this show so much I downloaded [Carole King](#)'s "Tapestry" album on my phone as I left the premises. This is a winner. I foresee a heavy demand for tickets which are available at:

Box Office (402) 553-0800. You can also purchase tickets at [ticketomaha.com](http://ticketomaha.com) or [wallet.ticketomaha.com](http://wallet.ticketomaha.com).

The show runs September 15-October 15.

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SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

## All Kinds of Wonderful

Ginger Johnson stars as Carole King in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*

It's the story of the rise of one of America's premier songwriters: Carole King. Come see her rise to the top of the charts in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* which is currently playing at the Omaha Community Playhouse.

When it comes to pop songwriters, Carole King is virtually in a class by herself. Her legendary partnership with Gerry Goffin churned out some of the biggest hits of the 1960s. I was unaware just how many hit songs I knew came from the pens of Goffin-King. Douglas McGrath does tremendous justice to both King's songwriting career and her music as the show smoothly transitions between her personal life and the chart toppers she helped to conjure. In the hands of the cast and crew of the Playhouse, it is an epic that's going to have people talking for a long, long time.

Stephen Santa's direction is downright impeccable. The pacing is phenomenal as the time just zips by as the show transitions from story to song and back. Santa drills the show's emotional beats from the joys of King's rise to superstardom to the tragedy of her chaotic relationship with Goffin to her rise from those ashes as a top singer in her own right. Santa's guidance of the performers is top notch and each and every one is a joy to watch.

On the acting side of things, you'll enjoy Kevin Olsen combine bluntness and open-mindedness as the famed producer, Don Kirschner. Connie Lee shines as King's very Brooklyn mother, Genie Klein. Maddy Stark and Laurence Katz have astonishing chemistry as songwriting duo, Cynthia Weil and Barry Mann and their adroit repartee was one of the highlights of the night.

On the singing side of things, each member of the ensemble got their moment to shine, but The Drifters (Tyler Marshall, Brendan Brown, Allen Griffin, Kevin Jones) really had the audience cheering with "Up On the Roof", "On Broadway", and "Some Kind of Wonderful". Not to be undone, The Shirelles (Charity Williams, Monica Weber, Ejanee Hume, Maya Bartee) matched them step for step with "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow".

James Verderamo cuts a tragic figure as Gerry Goffin. Verderamo's Goffin is a lyrical genius, but never satisfied with what he has and is always looking for the next big thing. Verderamo well captures Goffin's battle with manic-depression as he laments not being able to keep up with the times as the style of songwriting changes over the latter half of the 60s and his desire to have his cake and eat it too, by remaining married to King, but indulging in other romances. Verderamo also has a fine, mellow voice exemplified in "Take Good Care of My Baby" and his personal take on "Up On the Roof".

Ginger Johnson had the crowd eating out of the palm of her hand as Carole King. Johnson could do it all. Her acting was pluperfect with an iron grip on King's emotional beats as she grew from hopeful teenaged songwriter to assured adult in both music and her personal life. She was a fantastic pianist as she played her songs live. And what a voice! Johnson beautifully interpreted King's songs from her opening turn with "So Far Away" to her tearful "One Fine Day" and brought the house down with a double whammy in "(You Make Me Feel Like a) Natural Woman" and "Beautiful".

Jim Boggess reached a level of purity in his musical direction that I didn't think possible. His conducting of the orchestra was so clean and precise and his singers had such elegant harmonies and emotional power. Melanie Epps' choreography was as simple as it was accurate. No flashy numbers. Just the simple dance movements of rock and roll performers that were so true to the era. Jim Othuse's stage was made of a revolving disc used to switch scenes and aided some of Epps' choreography and the centerpiece were musical bars centered around a cone of notes that split and reconnected as the scenes needed. Josh Wroblewski's colorful lighting of the musical bars was an eye catcher, but his projection of lyrics as King's iconic songs were created and sung was the real showstopper. Tim Burkhart's ambient sounds were well weaved into the tapestry of the play. Andrew Morgan's properties helped to create the illusion of both office, home, and TV studio. Lindsay Pape's costumes were dead on the mark and matched the conservative styles of the early 60s to the more free-spirited ones of the mid to late 60s.

OCP has set a high bar with this production which will go down as another melodic masterpiece. With a nearly full house on preview night, I'm foreseeing sellouts aplenty. So grab a ticket and find out just why I call this show "All Kinds of Wonderful".

*Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* plays at Omaha Community Playhouse through Oct 15. Performances are Wed-Sat at 7:30pm and Sundays at 2pm. Tickets start at \$25 and can be purchased at omahaplayhouse.com, visiting the OCP Box Office, or calling 402-553-0800. The Omaha Playhouse is located at 6915 Cass St in Omaha, NE.

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