

On Theater: The '60s, '70s live on

Tom Titus

9:24 PM PDT, June 17, 2010

Tameca DeVant belts out "Respect," backed by (from left) Susan K. Berkompas, Rich Wordes, Vanda Eggington, Jef Canter and James Mulligan in the first-act finale of "Boomers" at Vanguard University.

If you entered this world between 1946 and 1964, then you're a "Boomer." The accompanying term "Baby" has long since been discontinued.

Vanguard University's American Coast Theater Company celebrated this significant generation last summer with the original musical tribute "Boomers." It was so well received they're bringing it back this year, just in case you may have missed it.

This long-running San Diego musical was created by Kerry Meads and Vanguard's own Vanda Eggington. Both are very much involved in the current production, with Meads directing and Eggington performing, serving as musical director and re-creating Pamela Turner's original choreography.

It's an all-inclusive glimpse of a generation, from sitting around a black-and-white TV set watching "Howdy Doody" in the 1950s to enjoying senior citizens' discounts in the present day. In between are more than 150 songs (or snippets of) marking the signposts of the journey.

For the first part of the program, it's pretty much all nostalgic fun and games. The line of demarcation, however, is drawn on Nov. 22, 1963. From that point through the rest of the decade, the emphasis is on Vietnam War protests, race riots, drug consumption, feminist rallies and other sobering subjects.

In the end, the Boomers have reached maturity, AARP membership and the debatable joys of senior citizenship. They're still a feisty lot, though the temperature has been turned down several degrees.

Meads and Eggington put the seven performers — Eggington is joined by Vanguard artistic director Susan K. Berkompas, James Whitson, Jef Canter, James Mulligan, Tameca DeVant and Rich Wordes — through their paces, briskly at first, then more somberly.

How many TV show themes from the '60s can you recall? Chances are the ACTC troupe has most, if not all, of them covered in a bouncy first-act potpourri backed by a fine four-piece band, which seeks to fast-forward through the '70s because, as one musician protests, "We don't do disco."

Following President Kennedy's assassination, and stretching through the shootings at Kent State, the mood darkens considerably. The consternation and confrontations of the period are brought into focus, bolstered by the more poignant music of the period.

Relationships are examined in the second act, with one popular song segueing into another in a more relaxed environment. Couples meet, argue, part and reunite as the musical mood dictates.

All six principal performers, along with Whitson's egghead professor, acquit themselves admirably. Mulligan is particularly impressive as a youngish Boomer who's not quite on the same wavelength as the others.

"Boomers" is a show that can be enjoyed by all, but especially those in the age group it celebrates. It's a welcome return visit by a show that should become an annual event.

TOM TITUS reviews local theater for the Daily Pilot. His reviews appear Fridays.

If You Go

What: "Boomers"

Who: American Coast Theater Company

Where: Vanguard University, 55 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa

When: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays through July 18

Cost: \$20 to \$25

Call: (714) 619-6424