

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Theater Review

'Life Could Be a Dream'

By Ben Miles

Roger Bean, the creator of 2007's award-winning, "The Marvelous Wonderettes," is back. Bean's formula for "Wonderettes" remains intact in his latest musical retrospective, "Life Could Be a Dream," but "Life" is arguably an even better show than the mega-stage hit "Wonderettes." Still, if you like one you'll surely enjoy the other. And, if you have an ear for the early classics of rock 'n roll – pleasing ditties such as "Stay," "Only You," "Duke of Earl," and "Pretty Little Angel Eyes" – "Life" (as well as the "Wonderettes") is definitely for you.

The conceit for "Life," like "Wonderettes," lies in the transition from teenage to coming-of-age. In the "Wonderettes" the action centers on a high school dance and reunion. In "Life" the story has as its focus a battle-of-the-bands sort of radio contest, in the early 1960s. But Bean's purpose with each staging – "Life" and "Wonderettes" – is to showcase an able ensemble of performers digging into a song book that's rich in harmony, full of puppy-love angst, and loaded with memorable lyrics. Bean accomplishes this goal admirably in a show that's nothing if not adorable.

A couple of guys meets regularly in the basement of a parent's home. After learning of a local radio station's talent competition, Denny – the basement dweller – and Eugene

– a nerdish aspirant to all that appears just beyond his grasp (Josey Montana McCoy and Hunter Berecochea, respectively and impressively, both with a mutually energizing presence and Berecochea with an astonishing Frankie Valli-like falsetto) – decide to assemble a crew of vocalist to prepare for the showdown on the airwaves.

Confounded by their need for a sponsor, the group – which has enlisted Wally (a charmingly expressive J. Thomas Miller) into the contest – now must convince some local business to support them in their showcasing endeavors. As it happens, Lois, the daughter of an auto dealership-owner (the radiant and vocally pristine Marisa Matthews), comes to the rescue. What's more, she brings to the group's first meeting, Skip – a mechanic from her father's car lot (charismatic baritone, Trevor Shor). Not only is the grease-monkey handsome, even with an oil-smudged mug – he can sing.

Directed and choreographed by Jamie Torcelli, with upbeat musical direction by Bill Wolfe (on the piano) backed by Adolfo Kushelevish (guitar) and Juan Garcia (percussion) – "Life Could Be a Dream" is loaded with nostalgia and a "Happy Days"-like good cheer. With costumes (by Kim DeShazo); hair and wig designs (Anthony Gagliardi); sound design (Dave Mickey); and scenic design (Amanda J. Stuart), "Life Could Be a Dream" is a dreamy through back