

Review: Beautiful – The Carole King Musical *****



About seven years ago I watched a documentary on BBC4 about Carole King. It was an intimate telling of her life and her immense song writing talent, showcasing her best-selling album Tapestry which took the world by storm back in 1971. It remains one of the best music documentaries I've seen so when Beautiful – The Carole King Musical arrived at the Edinburgh Playhouse on Tuesday evening I just had to go along.

The musical tells the story of King's early career, from changing her surname from Klein at the age of 16 in 1958 to being the inspiration behind Neil Sedaka's Oh! Carol hit in 1959. King is played brilliantly by Bronte Barbe, well-known in theatre circles but perhaps best known for being a finalist in the BBC's Over the Rainbow showcase of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Forging an early song writing partnership with Gerry Goffin, King and the man she would marry begin writing hit songs for the likes of The Shirelles, The Drifters, Bobby Vee and Little Eva (The Loco-Motion) Fame and fortune beckon for King and Goffin but Beautiful explores the personal relationship between the pair as well as their great friendship with fellow songwriters Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. The story has humour aplenty as witnessed when Little Eva can no longer babysit for King and Goff as 'she's too busy doing the Loco-Motion'!

The sterling cast of performers helped produce an evening of hit song after hit song. Bronte Barbe captured the passion of King's performances and her powerful rendition of It's Too Late, from the 1971 album Tapestry, almost brought a lump to my throat. Although the lyrics to this song were written by Toni Stern it was King who wrote the music and it was a clear

reference to her break-up with Gerry Goffin. Although King would work with her ex-husband again five years later it would be on a professional basis only – she married another songwriter, Rick Evers in 1977.

It should be said Barbe doesn't try to impersonate Carole King, but she provides a strong interpretation of the great songwriter and her performance is both energetic and touching. King herself would be proud of it.

The show is superbly produced subtly moving from a frenetic pace to gentle hushed tones. What makes it powerful, however, is the fact this is not a fictional story. This is the very real story of Carole King, one of the most gifted songwriters of her generation.

The huge audience at the Edinburgh Playhouse on Tuesday evening certainly enjoyed it and going by the lack of empty seats at the venue I would advise you to snap up a ticket while you still can.

Edinburgh Reporter review: *****

Beautiful – The Carole King Musical is in at The Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 2nd December 2017. Tickets [here.](#)