

Review: Motown The Musical

What's your outlook in life? Ain't no mountain high enough? Are you dancin' in the street come the weekend? Or is it a case of I can't help myself?

If you're a lover of Motown music you'll probably have an inkling of what I'm talking about – and you'll most likely be heading to Edinburgh's Playhouse in the next couple of weeks to see Motown The Musical, a wonderful tribute to Berry Gordy, the man who started it all and who enabled an array of talented black artists to make it big in the United States of America in the 1960s and 70s at a time when racial division was rife across the pond.



Photo: Tristram Kenton

Gordy was record producer, executive, and songwriter supreme (can you see what I did there?) and the driving force behind legendary acts such as Diana Ross and the Supremes, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, The Four Tops, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson and The Jackson Five and many others. Indeed, Gordy had nearly 60 chart-topping acts in the USA.

Motown the Musical is a tribute not only to Gordy but those acts who overcame prejudices to become household names on both sides of the Atlantic. The show is based on the book by Gordy himself, still going strong as he prepares to celebrate his 89th birthday next week.

The show charts the growth of the Motown record label – derived from Gordy's hometown Detroit's moniker as a 'motor town' – from small beginnings in the late 1950s to the 25th anniversary celebration in 1983.

Edward Baruwa gives a brilliant performance as Gordy and his co-star is the wonderfully talented Karis Anderson who plays Diana Ross – not only Gordy's protegee but life partner. It's an often bitter-sweet story with Gordy hurt and angered with some of his stars for leaving him for more lucrative deals

elsewhere – including Ross who was offered a stunning \$20m to sign for RCA Records. Indeed, the story concludes with Gordy reluctant to join the 25th anniversary celebrations but eventually succumbs to his lifelong desire to ‘simply make people happy’.

As always in shows like these the music is the real star. Motown classic is followed by Motown classic with 50 songs that are instantly recognisable to devotees of the genre. My personal Motown favourite – Shotgun by Junior Walker and the All Stars – was cut short much to my disappointment but there are many other songs which are performed superbly by a largely unknown cast and this makes for a fabulous evening’s entertainment.

The second half of the show tends to focus more on Gordy’s relationship with Diana Ross, but Karis Anderson plays the part of Ross so well you could be forgiven for thinking it was the global superstar who was on stage.

There were other notable performances such as Shak Gabbidon-Williams as Marvin Gaye, and Nathan Lewis as Smokey Robinson. And the performance of the youngsters playing Michael Jackson as a child threatened to steal the show!

There seems to be nothing but bad news in the world these days but if you’re looking for a feel-good factor to escape the woes then the sheer energy, spirit and passion that is Motown the Musical is for you.

Edinburgh Reporter Review: *****

Motown the Musical is at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 8th December 2018. Tickets [here](#).