

## THEATER

# SCT's 'Hair' is a fun flashback to the '60s

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Published 3:44 p.m. PT Sept. 6, 2018 | Updated 5:44 p.m. PT Sept. 6, 2018

It takes no time whatsoever to be transported to 1968, an era of hippies, free love, drugs, protests and rock music, the journey beginning the minute the doors open for Stockton Civic Theatre's production of "Hair."

Cast members greet the audience, in full costume, some bearing flowers.

A psychedelic painted Volkswagen bus on the stage and graffiti on the set walls — "War is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things," and "Flower Power" among others — further re-create that time of turmoil.

Remarkably, a cast of mostly 20-somethings steps into that era without restraint and believably portrays a generation that changed the world.

What's stunning about SCT's production is the realization that not that much has changed in the half-century since "Hair" debuted. The anti-Vietnam War protests paved the way for future marches against other wars, for civil rights, against police brutality, for a compassionate immigration policy, and for gay rights and any other cause.

Just how prescient the writers were hits you early. First, a well-cast Brandon Masterson as Woof sings "Sodomy," with a church-themed reverence, and later, Ashlyn Kelley as Jeanie, Imri Tate as Dionne and Karissa Kiriou as Crissy sing "Air." It was written as an anthem about air pollution. Now, we call it climate change.

"Hair" is loaded with social commentary, brilliantly written in real time by 1960s actor/poets Gerome Ragni and James Rado, and put to music by Galt MacDermot. Anyone alive in that era will remember the music, many of the songs turned into top-40 hits, including "Aquarius," "Easy to be Hard," "Hair" and "Good Morning Starshine." I was only 10 at the time, but I was stunned when the cast launched into "Initials" with the lyrics "LBJ took the IRT down to Fourth Street USA. When he got there what did he see? The youth of American

on LSD” and I knew all the words, having learned them by listening to an older sister’s “Hair” soundtrack.

It was fun to flash back to that time and and easy to make the leap thanks to the countless ways Stockton Civic Theatre’s production, directed by Dennis Beasley, re-creates the period.

Costumers Kathie Dixon and Cathy Hastings deserve a lot of credit for nailing the era. Does anyone else remember how people used to cut a slit in the bottom of their jeans’ legs and sew in colorful fabric to create bell bottoms? And, Craig Vincent’s lighting design, using blacklight and other popular devices of the ’60s, lends authenticity to that time.

Best of all, of course, is that this young cast worked hard to understand the lives of people who are now old enough to be their parents or grandparents.

They even move in that free-spirit way associated with the time period, thanks largely to the choreography of James Reed. Whether dancing up tempo to “Hippie Life” or slowing down as they move through a drug haze, their dances seem spontaneous and genuine.

Reed took on the lead role of Claude after agreeing to choreograph the show, and the commitment pays off. He’s at the top of his game a performer, believable as the laid-back, easily amused leader of the hippie tribe occupying the park, and as a young man wrestling with whether to burn his draft notice or be inducted into the U.S. Army. Reed, the son of a Vietnam veteran, said it’s difficult to hold it together during the climactic final scenes, but he’s too much of a pro not to.

He gives a performance that is funny, raw and touching.

His character’s counterpart, Berger, is superbly played by Navaz Khan, a San Joaquin Delta College student making his SCT debut. Berger is all vim and vigor and defiance and Khan makes him likeable and endearing. Hopefully this is just the beginning of a relationship between Khan and SCT. He’s a real talent, an actor, singer and dancer who could strengthen any production.

A truly ensemble cast, there are moments for nearly everyone to shine, including Masterson as Woof, Kelley as Jeanie and Esther Henderson as Sheila, who delivers two of the most memorable songs (“Easy To Be Hard” and “Good Morning Starshine”).

The person it’s hard to take your eyes off, though, is Imri Tate, another Delta College student. A beautiful young woman with adorable dimples, Tate is fresh off a role in That’s Showbiz’s fabulous production of “Ain’t Misbehavin.’ ” She reunites with talented cast members Cole

Bryant and Marquis Hannon from that show for a wonderful first-act number, “Dead End,” along with Zada McClendon and Donald Turner. Her role as Dionne allows Tate to show off her range, though, with the Supremes-style “White Boys” and a comic turn as Abraham Lincoln during Claude’s “trip.” Like Khan, Tate can be a valuable addition to the SCT family.

“Hair” broke all the rules of theater, with its contemporary rock music, breaking the fourth wall by having actors speak to the audience and having its cast disrobe for a fully nude scene. Those latter two continue to be out of the norm, but they work.

Beasley gave his cast a choice whether to disrobe or not and more than half of them do. It’s shocking, but not offensive, and didn’t seem to bother Wednesday night’s preview crowd.

In fact, the show drew a standing ovation, something the preview audience rarely gives.

“Hair” is an important piece of theater, because of its daring style that changed musicals, but just as importantly, because its messages still matter. Issues that divided the country in 1968 still divide us to some extent. It tried to teach us to stop worrying about how people wear their hair or what kind of clothes they put on their body. Hearing what others have to say is much more important, and that’s a lesson that never goes out of style.

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**What:** Stockton Civic Theatre production of the R-rated “Hair,” directed by Dennis Beasley

**When:** Friday through Sept. 30 with 7:30 p.m. shows Thursdays through Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. Sundays

**Where:** Stockton Civic Theatre, 2312 Rosemarie Lane

**Tickets:** \$27, \$22 seniors, \$15 students available at the box office, open 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Friday at (209) 473-2424 or at [sctlivetheatre.com](http://sctlivetheatre.com)

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