Theatre Royal Plymouth

Mowtown the Musical .Act 1

Audio described performance

Saturday August 17th 2019 @2.30p.m.

Welcome ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls to Kevin Mc Collum, Doug Morris, Adam Spiegel and Berry Gordy's production of Mowtown the Musical written by Berry Gordy, and directed by Charles Randolph- Wright.

There will be an orchestra made up of 11 players led by Griff Johnson. My name is Pauline, the audio describer for Act 1 and the duration of this performance will be 2 hours and 35 minutes which includes a 20 minute interval, after which my colleague, Denise will start her programme notes for Act 2.

There will be psychedelic flashing lights and gunshots.

Background

With just $800 borrowed from his family, Berry Gordy founded Motown Records in 1959 and launched the careers of legendary artists including Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, The Temptations, Michael Jackson Five and many more.

MOTOWN THE MUSICAL tells the story of the man who broke barriers , fought against the odds to create something more than a record label. Discover the story behind Motown, the personal relationships, the professional struggles,  and – of course – the music that made history, defined the sound of a generation and got the whole world moving to the same beat

This is the next chapter in Motown’s incredible history and is an experience you’ll never forget. Featuring over 50 classic hits including “My Girl,” “What’s Going On,” “Dancing in the Street,” “I Heard It Through The Grapevine” and “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough”.

The story, spanning more than 25 years ,will unfold, by switching across the decades and is rapidly punctuated with performances by The Four Tops, The Temptations, The Supremes, Jackie Wilson, Berry Gordy, The Miracles, Martha Reeves and the Vandelas, Diana Ross, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, The Marveletes, The Jackson 5 and the Contours.It is a jukebox musical which premièred on Broadway in April 2013 and is based on Berry Gordy's autobiography' To Be Loved'.

Each of the 29 scenes for this Act will transition into the next with the addition of a back projection of the relevant townscape with pillars and columns and minimum props brought on to furniture the scenes.

The midnight black curtain displays a huge Mowtown motif of a large 3D capital M in gold with a white lit shadow. It is made up of one slim isosceles triangle next to two identical sloping rectangles with the left hand corners trimmed to form a stylised M. This will flash blue, green, gold and purple before the curtain rises to reveal another huge industrial style metal Mowtown motif depicting 25 years of Mowtown against a deep purple back screen.

It is 1983 and we are in Pasadena, the Civic Auditorium and a rehearsal is under way for the silver celebration. The motif parts to allow The Four Tops to enter and begin their act dressed in light jackets with red buttonholes and dark trousers with a dark cumberbund. They alternate with The Temptations dressed in shiny blue suits, also red buttonholes, black bow ties and a dark cumberbund before Suzanne, the producer stops the acts.

Berry Gordy's Los Angeles home in 1983 boasts a cosy wood panelled room with a tiled surround fireplace and brass fender . On each side of this are twin shaded wall lamps. On the panelled walls are various framed pictures of musicians, A high back armchair faces a low table supporting a small television.

We go back in time to 1938 and to the Gordy family home .A boxing match between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling is taking place and is screened at the back and the Gordy family, Mother and Pop, little Berry aged 8, six of his brothers and sisters, Fuller, Esther, Anna, Loucye, George and Gwen are watching; an announcer commentates on Joe Louis' success and the screens either side of the tableau depict black people all over the neighbourhood celebrating his victory as it is depicted as a victory for America against Nazi Germany.

It is 1983 and Berry is now 29 years old and he is outside the Flame Show Bar with his sisters Gwen and Anna and he waits for Jackie Wilson who arrives accompanied by two ladies. He has his cream dark fur lapelled crombie draped around his shoulders and his ladies are in cocktail dresses with fur stoles. There are adverts under the lit words ' The Flame', across the front of the building advertising Jackie Wilson, The Dukes and Andre D'Orsay. Jackie jumps into a performance shedding his coat to reveal a pink suit with a black cumberbund.

A staircase bends around the corner of flowery patterned walls in Gwen's house and the walls are adorned with family photos. An upright piano facing away from us ,stands at the base of the stairs. Gwen Gordy and Berry face each other, his suitcase stands beside him.

It is Jackie Wilson's office and there is a street sign on the right, a piano on the left with posters adorning a wall above a filing cabinet. Jackie is auditioning an act of four men and a girl when Berry addresses him.

In Gordy Grocer's there is shop counter with jars of sweets and a wooden sign above it saying Gordy and family. The Gordy family are gathered behind and in front of the counter. Berry is with them whilst his aging grandparents look on.

Berry's newly acquired house is having a facelift. Two blue doors with a small diamond window are on either side of a large picture window. A small group of girls and boys are busy cleaning and the last letter of Hitsville USA is painted above the window. A smart street of porched houses is in the background and Berry meets the former elderly owner, in her shabby cardigan and pleated skirt.

Outside the new house in front of one of the blue doors and Berry encounters , for the first time, Diana , Mary and Florence dressed in full skirts nipped at the waist with plain blouses and wearing bobby socks and alice bands in their hair.

At WJBKA Radio studio, a desk is on the left with a twin record player and phone. ON AIR is displayed as Berry accosts the DJ, Tom Clay; Berry is in a suit whilst the DJ is casually dressed in a striped polo shirt and light trousers. A sign above them declares WJBK on a purple background.

Blue curtains and a blue pelmet dress the revue Stage of Motortown and posters advertise various artists. The Supremes make an entrance dressed in pink satin cocktail skirts with sequinned tops. As they sing, segregation images flash across the screens at either side. . The Marvelletes perform a number when a shot rings out. Maps of the area move across the back screens . Segregation is at its height.

In the Hitsville Office and Smokey is on a Pay phone in Birmingham. Berry and Smokey are on opposite sides of the space talking to each other on the phone about the gun shot and the segregation issues.

In the Performance Hall on the next night, the acts are cautious but decide to go on with two security guards patrolling the stage as they perform. Two signs are on left and right, 'Coloreds only' 'Whites only'. Smokey sings first, followed by the timid Contours in blue suits with dark lapels. The girl singer is in a deep red full skirted dress nipped at the waist. Two aggressive security guards patrol the Hall keeping the people in order and separated.

We are back in the Hitsville Studio in 1963 and Berry Gordy's company, Stax Records is just setting out with little known groups and soloists who sing Detroit Soul, Deep Soul, a fusion of rhythm, blues and gospel and Southern Soul aka Blue -eyed Soul( this last being recorded by white artists.) Berry, in a grey waistcoat and trousers is at the desk console before a right hand wall laden with banks of reel tapes and controls. A young Diana joins him . She is in a sweet pink dress with a matching alice band. As she leaves a screen shows a TV announcer telling the world that President Kennedy has been assassinated.

In the Hitsville office and a large table is on the left with a chalk board behind it. A door is on the right. Six men and two ladies are seated around the table whilst Berry is talking to them. A singer, Mary Wells is spotlighted singing a song the group have discussed. She is a petite ash blond in a sequinned red dress; after she finishes, the Supremes are spotlighted on the right in pale green shift dresses and sing their recent hit.

The Supremes perform again whilst a top ten chart keeps changing to finally list the Supremes as number one.

Back in the Hitsville house and the room is decorated with giant gold discs above a shelf on the left.

A brief visit to a pirate radio ship with a British DJ enthusiastically introducing the Supremes and he melts away and we are on the TV set of Ready, Steady Go programme and The Supremes are performing. Berry triumphantly greets the girls backstage.

Berry is greeting Diana and Mary after the performance before Diana performs Love is here and now you're gone. Whilst they perform, Smokey has a conversation with Berry.

After a number by the Temptations, Berry joins Diana in a small Parisian cafe on the right. They leave and the Temptations are walking past a street cafe greeting the french girls before we join Berry and Diana on the balcony of their hotel suite. Berry is hugging a pillow and is not happy.

It is 1965 and The Supremes have the Copacabana stage in long blue dresses with pretty lace bodices. In another part of the club, lawyers are advising some of Berry's acts.

A demo outside the Hitsville House is in full swing against Berry's decision to drop some artists.

Still outside Hitsville and feelings are high against the War in Vietnam. All the protesters are in hippie style 60's dress, such as fringed waistcoats, headbands, crochet waistcoats , flared trousers . Martin Luther King Jnr's voice can be heard and his images are projected on the screens and we hear a single gunshot which marks his assassination.

Cast

Berry Gordy Edward Baruwa

Diana Ross Karis Anderson

Smokey Robinson Nathan Lewis

Marvin Gaye Shak Gabbidon- Williams

Stevie Wonder Daniel Haswell

Young Michael Jackson Jovy Domingos

Carlo Brathwaite

Daniel Cort

Brando Velho

Suzanne Natalie Brown

Mary Wilson Olivia Hibbert

Martha Reeves Nicole Nyarambi

Jackie Wilson Reece Richards

Word Total 1791

Time taken 11 minutes

**Motown the Musical**

**Prrogramme Notes – Act Two**

**Audio Described Performance – Saturday 17th August 2019 @ 2:30 pm**

**Welcome back everyone to this iconic and spectacular musical where we are transported back into the past with flashbacks of the life of the label’s founder Berry Gordy and the unforgettable music of Motown.**

**I am Denise your audio describer for Act Two which lasts for 65 minutes.**

**Act Two opens as the curtain slowly lifts to reveal a bare stage bathed in soft lighting. Five spotlights beam down onto The Temptations who are stood in line with their backs to us behind five microphone stands. As the music begins they turn around in turn from right to left and begin their dance routine as they sing one of their hit songs, “Ball of Confusion”. They are dressed in snazzy silver suits with open jackets, red open neck shirts, their cuffs turned back onto their sleeves, a red kerchief in their jacket pocket and a red insert at the base of their flared trousers. On the back screen three images of the earth are projected and converge into one. Further images reveal the moon landing, and events that occurred during that confusing period of the 1960’s in America.**

**It is now day time and Diana, Mary and Cindy are in a photo shoot. To the right stands a very large picture of the record sleeve entitled “Love Child” by the successful Diana Ross and The Supremes. The photoshoot ends leaving Diana (dressed in a bright yellow top with the words “I love Black” on the front and a short tartan patterned skirt), talking with Berry dressed in a smart suit and sporting a beard, about the future of the group.**

**It is now 1968 and as The Temptations walk on in the background continuing singing Ball of Confusion, we move to the right and Berry’s office in Hitsville where young activist Edna, wearing a multi-coloured blouse tucked into blue jeans, is talking with Berry. Edna believes that Black people cannot get ahead in Motown.**

**Other employees converge also concerned about their futures and the potential move of Motown. Marvin Gaye sings about it all in the song “I Heard it through the Grapevine”, wearing a fuscia pink jacket with black sparkly lapels and dark trousers.**

**Meanwhile in Studio A, young Michael Jackson and his four brothers are rehearsing James Brown’s “I Got the Feelin’.” Young Michael is dressed in beige trousers and shoes with a plum coloured polo neck top. His four brothers – two playing guitars – wear smart casuals of open necked shirts and trousers. Berry and Suzanne look on, but it would appear that Berry doesn’t care much for kid’s groups.**

**As a plane jets across the skyline above a moving banner of palm trees, we are transported to the heart of the entertainment world, Hollywood. Four male variety show-style dancers in flashy gold coloured suits open the show in front of the word Hollywood in big letters. An ABC announcer introduces the hosts of the show and the stage comes alive with a glamourous backdrop of bright lights and Hollywood Palace in big letters headlining the appearance of Diana Ross and The Supremes. All look stunning in long halter neck fitted black dresses with gold and silver sparkling scrolls running from top to bottom. Their hair is worn piled high complimented by diamante drop earrings and open toed glitter sandals. They sing one of their hit songs, “The Happening” at the end of which Diana makes an announcement and presents the youngest members of the Motown family, The Jackson Five. Appearing in their iconic outfits with Michael dressed in a white shirt, ivory trousers and shoes. His purple waistcoat has a long fringe and is matched by a purple boater style hat with a silver band as he fronts a trio of their well-known songs.**

**Meanwhile backstage, bright lights and a big star with the words Ms Ross hangs above Diana’s dressing room. Berry and Diana, dressed in a long coral silk dressing gown, stand outside discussing the next song that is going to launch her solo career.**

**The set is now lit up in blue with the headline banner of Frontier in big white letters framing the stage of the Frontier Hotel and four background singers appear on stage - two girls dressed in long black gowns edged in diamante and two men in shiny black suits with white shirts and white pocket kerchiefs. Diana Ross makes her debut solo appearance dressed in an evocative, yet stunning white lame long dress with long sleeves, deep V neckline and thigh length slit in the front. Her long dark hair is drawn back from her face and falls around her shoulders. She wears long diamante earrings and diamante open toed high heels.**

**During the song “Reach out and touch somebody’s hand”, she interacts directly with the audience.**

**In stark contrast Diana and Berry holiday in the Bahamas. On the left is a floral covered rattan two seater sofa. Beside is a small table on which is a white telephone and a beautiful floral display. The backdrop is that of a beautiful orange Caribbean sky with palm trees and a blue sea. Berry dressed in leisure wear of white shirt and trousers is on the phone to Harold who is standing on the other side of the stage answering his call. Diana joins Berry on the sofa dressed in a light open white long sleeved top over a stunning white swimsuit. The phone rings constantly as each caller appears in turn on the other side of the split stage.**

**We then find Berry back in his office which is lit up on the right of the stage. A grey desk sits in front of dark wood panelled walls littered with framed gold records. A large clock on the right hand wall shows the time as 2:55 pm. Marvin, dressed very casually in a knitted skull cap, blue Denim shirt and jeans, black Doc Martin type boots, is concerned with changes around him and discusses what he wants to do with Berry.**

**Then onto Diana’s glamourous dressing room – with a blue back wall in front of which is a long mirrored dressing table framed in lights and littered with make-up pots etc., and flowers in a vase. In front is a chair and on the right is a long very stylish pink chaise longue style sofa. The side walls are covered in a stylish pattered turquoise wallpaper with a white framed blue picture on the right hand wall. Diana wears an elegant gold off the shoulder dress, complimented by glittering earrings and gold high heeled sandals. Berry has some news for Diana.**

**As the dressing room fades away and Diana continues to sing “Good Morning Heartache”, we see Berry on a movie set in conversation with a Paramount Studio Head.**

**Back in the Motown offices, it is hunting season and Motown is the biggest game in town. A desk is on the right with a TV on it. Edna and Suzanne are there with Berry discussing the problems that face them.**

**Somewhat in limbo, a variety of artists delight us with a medley of hits from the old days. Smokey Robinson, The Commodores, Rick James, Stevie Wonder, Teena Marie – their names headline above as they appear in turn together with the title of their song. Berry looks on from the side marvelling at them all.**

**Transitioning to the music of “Do you know where you’re going to” we move to backstage In Diana’s dressing room. Diana wears a vivid red fitted gown with shoe string straps and talks to Berry about her future.**

**Simultaneously, we now see Diana in sparkling glory with her arms raised high and a flowing red layered cloak over her red dress performing “Remember Me” on stage. The set is framed by the word Diana in big white letters. The back wall is lit in rows of small lights that interchange in colour and as Berry looks on from the wings.**

**It is now 1983 and it is afternoon in Berry Gordy’s house and he is sitting in his armchair as he hears the voice of Diana singing. A television sits on a small table on the other side of the room. The wall lights are on above the fireplace and Berry is a subdued mood contemplating the past and what used to be, as he sings “Can I close the door on Love”.**

**Finally, it is 25 years of Motown and we are on stage to celebrate. The stage is empty save for the large Motown motif – split into three to join as one in the centre. It dominates the back wall and is lit up and with the numbers 25 standing out. The whole ensemble gather for this epic and glamourous evening with the ladies in long dresses and the men in black tie as the company sing a medley of iconic songs. As they do so, pictures of the story of Motown in both black and colour is projected onto the back screen, before the show curtain falls on this legend.**

**Words: 1529 Time: 10 minutes**