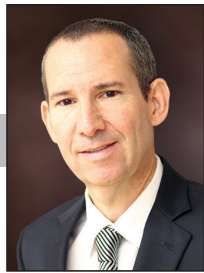


If you love The Temptations then Tony Award winning *Ain't Too Proud* is a must see on Broadway

Travel Talk

MIKE COHEN



Last spring I saw *Motown the Musical* at Place des Arts, the American dream story of **Motown** founder Berry Gordy's journey from featherweight boxer to the heavyweight music mogul who launched the careers of Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Smokey Robinson and many more. I loved every minute of it. So when I visited New York City recently, I was naturally drawn to *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*. It won a 2019 Tony Award for Best Choreography and had 12 nominations.

The Temptations are an American vocal group who released a series of successful singles and albums with Motown during the 1960s and 70s. Featuring five male vocalists and dancers, the group formed in 1960 in Detroit, Michigan under the name *The Elgins* and gave us such memorable hits as *My Girl*, *Ain't Too Proud to Beg*, *I Wish It Would Rain*, *Treat Her Like a Lady*, *Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)* and *For Once In My Life*, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted* and more... They earned three Grammy Awards.

Otis Williams is the last living member of the Temptations. His book about the group is the basis for the Broadway show. Williams in fact continues to perform, using the Temptations name.

Ain't Too Proud, currently playing at the *Imperial Theatre* on West 45th Street until at least US Thanksgiving Weekend 2020, is the electrifying new musical that follows The Temptations' extraordinary journey from the streets of Detroit to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. With their signature dance moves and unmistakable harmonies, they rose to the top of the charts creating an amazing 42 Top 10 hits with 14 reaching number one. The rest is history — how they met, the groundbreaking heights they hit and how personal and political conflicts threatened to tear the group apart as the United States fell into civil unrest. This thrilling story of brotherhood, family, loyalty and betrayal is a beautiful production.

Tony Award nominee Derrick Baskin portrays Otis Williams and is the glue to the show. He narrates the



Ain't Too Proud is like watching a live concert. (Ephraim Sykes as David Ruffin kneeling) Photos: Matt Murphy

entire history of the Temptations from the opening number until the conclusion. Before walking into the theatre I simply knew the songs which made the Temptations so successful, but this is a true history lesson and it pulls no punches. There have been 24 members of the Temptations since this group was first established. Williams had to continually make the hard decisions and drop members who were not comporting themselves properly. At one point two of the singers who were let go returned for a reunion tour, but they could not turn over a new leaf. Williams himself was an absentee father and husband, focused exclusively on the business. I loved the show so much that the greatest hits of The Temptations are now loaded on my iPhone.

After breaking house records at both Berkeley Rep and The Kennedy Center, this musical is written by three-time Obie Award winner Dominique Morisseau, directed by two-time Tony Award winner Des McAnuff (*Jersey Boys*), and featuring choreography by Tony nominee Sergio Trujillo (*Jersey Boys*, *On Your Feet*).

Leading the current cast of *Ain't Too Proud* as The Temptations is Tony Award nominee Derrick Baskin

as Otis Williams, James Harkness as Paul Williams, Jawan M. Jackson as Melvin Franklin, Jelani Remy as Eddie Kendricks, and Tony Award nominee Ephraim Sykes as David Ruffin. *Ain't Too Proud* also features Saint Aubyn, Shawn Bowers, E. Clayton Cornelious, Taylor Symone Jackson, Jahi Kearse, Jarvis B. Manning, Jr., Joshua Morgan, Rashidra Scott, Nasia Thomas, Christian Thompson, Candice Marie Woods, Esther Antoine, Marcus Paul James, Correy West, Drew Wildman Foster, Curtis Wiley and Jamari Johnson Williams.

Tickets for *Ain't Too Proud* are available by visiting www.Telecharge.com, by calling 1-800-447-7400, or by visiting the Imperial Theatre Box Office (249 West 45th Street). For groups of 10 or more, visit www.BroadwayInbound.com or call 866-302-0995. The show runs two and a half hours.

If you wanted to see the exceptional Tony Award winning revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, it just closed its run on January 19. A tour will launched next fall, fittingly in Oklahoma, ultimately visiting other places in the United States and hopefully Montreal. The first collaboration between iconic Broadway duo Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Oklahoma!* premiered for the first time on Broadway in 1943. The musical is credited with being the first of its kind, integrating its book, score, and choreography with the goal of advancing the plot.

Making the production all the more unique was the set. Performed at Circle in the Square, a small and circular theatre, audience members are immersed in the experience. Some lucky audience members even had the opportunity to buy tickets providing them seats directly on stage, where they were teased and flirted with by the characters throughout the show. Red Crock-Pots sit on the tables on stage throughout act one, labelled "hot". Why? Because they are cooking the chili, which is served with corn bread to all audience members during intermission.

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Taylor Symone-Jackson, Candice-Marie Woods and Nasia Thomas as The Supremes in *Ain't Too Proud*