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TOP STORY

## Review: “Mamma Mia!” Returns to the Bankhead with Soaring Vocals and Bright Melodies

By David Jen  
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“Mamma Mia!” has returned to the Bankhead Theater after a shortened 2020 season due to the pandemic.

The Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre reopened the show last Friday with the return of producer Kathleen Breedveld, director Brian Olkowski and a mix of returning cast members and new performers.

The plot is straightforward enough: on a sleepy Greek island, 20-year-old Sophie Sheridan (Melissa Mombiosse) is planning her dream white wedding, but has yet to ask her father to give her away because she doesn't know who her father is. Her mother, Donna Sheridan (Annmarie Macry), is a feisty hotel owner who has buried her romantic past in her sole-proprietor struggles and has refused to provide Sophie details about her dad.

But by way of a convenient diary of her mom's, Sophie is able to narrow the paternal possibilities down to three men — Sam (Robert Lopez), Harry (Matthew Kelly) and Bill (Mike Freeman) — and she invites them all to the wedding behind her mother's back. In proper sitcom fashion, all three men agree without too much thought and arrive on the island the day before the wedding.

With the scene set, Sophie must establish her own paternity while hiding her investigation from her mother. And Donna must handle a surprise trio of rekindled emotions while navigating the generation gap between her and her daughter.

Tensions build until the fateful ceremony where Sophie and Donna both come clean, Sophie decides she doesn't really care who her father is and calls off the wedding, her groom calmly obliges, a new wedding between Donna and Sam takes its place, and Harry comes out of the closet; all inside the space of about two on-stage minutes.

That is to say, there is nothing left to do except throw your arms up and dance to the encores of "Mamma Mia!" "Dancing Queen" and "Waterloo."

Because that, after all, was Johnson's original intent: to construct a plot solely for the purpose of delivering as much disco-pop ABBA as possible.

But the script has accepted that about itself and once you accept that too, you are treated to a sugar-infused deluge of humor and music that you didn't know was allowed outside your shower.

Said deluge was on tap from the get-go Saturday night, when Mombiosse established her vocal command in the opening "I Have a Dream" and then transitioned soon after into "Honey, Honey."

Macry did not have a chance to truly show her range until second-act songs like "Slipping Through My Fingers" and "The Winner Takes it All," but the audience agreed the wait was well worth it.

These soaring vocals were supported by a five-piece band conducted by musical director Sierra Dee Rankin that supplied an acoustic fullness normally expected from a larger group. Bright electric-guitar melodies lent a refreshing update to some songs like “S.O.S.” and “Knowing Me, Knowing You.”

Scenery-wise, a simple set of white stucco walls in front of a peaceful seascape functioned well enough to move us through the rooms of Donna’s hotel. But more importantly, it provided windows and doors from which the chorus could pop in and out at musically opportune moments.

In the end, everyone left the theater with ABBA stuck in their heads, but Tri-Valley Rep made for a dancing-good time getting them in.

The performance runs through Nov. 21. For more information or tickets, visit [www.trivalleyrep.org/shows/mamma-mia](http://www.trivalleyrep.org/shows/mamma-mia).