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MUSIC

Make it Opera-Funky Now

By William S. Gooch—SeeingBlack.com Theater Critic

Is it possible to hear the music of such great composers as Donizetti, Verdi, Sondheim, Holland, Dozier & Holland, and Gamble & Huff all in one evening? In the new production of *Three Mo' Tenors*, currently playing off-Broadway in New York City, the seemingly impossible is achieved. Victor Robertson, Duane A. Moody and James N. Berger, Jr. thrill audiences with their mastery of operatic arias, Broadway show tunes, R&B classics and contemporary pop hits.



Modeled after Marion J. Caffey's original *Three Mo' Tenors*—which packed houses in 2000 and spawned a PBS documentary—this current incarnation, while still celebrating the vocal acuity and finesse of the African American operatic tenor, leans slightly more toward contemporary tunes and audience favorites. With a sparse, functional set, five-member band and stylish choreography, Robertson, Moody, and Berger conjure up memories of Ray Charles, the O'Jays, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Tavares, the Temptations, Queen, Al Jarreau and Marvin Gaye.

This evening of great singing opened with all three tenors ably singing “La donna è mobile” from Giuseppe Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. “Ah mes amis” from Donizetti’s *La fille du regiment* followed with Victor Robertson handling the pyrotechnical difficulties of the aria with natural aplomb. Duane A. Moody and James N. Berger, respectively, continued to anoint the ear with their powerful interpretations of Puccini’s “Nessum dorma” from *Turandot* and Samuel Barber’s “I Hear an Army.”

The tribute to Broadway began with all three tenors movingly singing “Bring Him Home” from *Les Miserables*. Moody tore into and devoured “Rain” from *Once on this Island* as if this was his last time to shine. And Berger convincingly crooned about the wonders of love in Sondheim’s “Being Alive” from *Company*.

The Queen medley was the surprise hit of the evening. Rocking Queen hits such as “Bohemian Rhapsody,” “I Want It All,” “We Are the Champions” and “We Will Rock You,” Robertson, Berger and Moody turn the Little Schubert Theatre into a mini rock stadium, complete with rock concert stage effects and wailing vocals.

The rousing soul medley demonstrates that all though the singers are heavily ensconced in the operatic world they still know how to get their groove on with such R&B classics as “Love Train,” “Midnight Train to Georgia,” “My Girl,” “Heaven Must Be Missing an Angel” and “Let’s Get It On.”

Individually, the three tenors in this cast bring a rich, distinctive approach to classical singing as well as contemporary music. Among the three artists, however, Victor Robertson was the standout. A true creature of the stage, Robertson’s natural charm comes across in every song performed. Comfortable in most musical genres, Robertson has an organic panache that makes audiences root for him.

Three Mo’ Tenors proves that opera does not have to be only for the cultural elite and that different genres of music can share time together on stage. And, like a child with a sweet tooth, we wanted the sweet singing to go on and on and on.

Three Mo’ Tenors runs at the Little Schubert Theatre through February 2008, 422 West 42nd Street, between 9th Avenue and Dwyer Street, New York, NY 10036, (212) 239-6200 (Outside the NY metro area (800) 432-7250).

