

Cleveland Pops and LEGACY: Broadway on the Severance stage (Feb. 1)

by Stephanie Manning



Cleveland is no stranger to welcoming Broadway talent, with Playhouse Square regularly hosting national tours of award-winning musicals. But on February 1, it felt like Broadway came to Severance Music Center instead.

The vocal quartet LEGACY teamed up with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra to present “Music of Motown,” a high-energy evening that was memorable in the best way. “Tonight is about having a really good time,” LEGACY founder

Justin Reynolds promised the packed crowd — and the two groups certainly delivered.

Reynolds, Matt Manuel, Michael Wordly, and Nigel Richards made for a charismatic team. Their soulful voices created lovely four-part harmonies in medleys from groups including the Jackson 5, the Four Tops, and Earth, Wind & Fire, delivered complete with choreography and costuming.

This approach felt perfectly natural for a group whose members have plenty of Broadway credits among them, including “Motown the Musical” and “Ain’t Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations.” Matt Manuel, who starred as Temptations lead singer David Ruffin in “Ain’t Too Proud,” knocked it out of the park with his performance of the title track in the evening’s Temptations Medley.

The Cleveland Pops Orchestra, led by Carl Topilow, provided enthusiastic support. The instrumental medleys — which gave the singers time for rest and costume changes — felt comfortably in-the-pocket, with the Michael Jackson Hit Mix highlighting the brass and rhythm section during “Beat It.”

On stage, the connection between the two groups remained strong, including Topilow’s own saxophone solo in the Four Tops’ “I Can’t Help Myself.” There were only a few timing stumbles in the selection “Just My Theodosia,” LEGACY’s mashup of “Dear Theodosia” from Hamilton with the Temptations’ “My Girl” and “Just My Imagination.”



Michael Wordly's crooning, emotive voice fit nicely with the original "Dear Theodosia" melody, as did his high notes in the Jackson 5's "I'll Be There." He and Matt Mercer then delivered an almost operatic duet in "Unbreak My Heart (Regresa Mi)," with passionate English and Spanish lyrics.

Justin Reynolds' flexible tenor register made him a good choice for selections like "Ain't

No Mountain High Enough" and as a young Micheal Jackson in the Jackson 5 Medley. Nigel Richards sometimes lost a little projection with such a large orchestra as backup, but he brought plenty of confidence to Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called To Say I Love You," which he led as an audience singalong.

Although the crowded house at Severance Music Center was excited from the start, transitioning to singalong mode did take a little convincing. Michael Worldly's attempt to get the audience on their feet during "September" by Earth, Wind & Fire, for example, didn't quite catch on.

But the quartet's encouragement and enthusiastic arm waving soon had people warming up and clapping along — and the eventual standing ovation felt completely genuine. So when Reynolds asked, "Have you enjoyed the show tonight?" The answer was a resounding YES.

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