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Pac Rep's 'Roots of Rock' is a rousing, roof-raising hit

By MAC McDONALD
GO! Editor

Why are people paying several hundred dollars each to see aging rockers such as the Rolling Stones and the Eagles or even packing the Golden State Theatre in Monterey to catch a musical tribute to The Beatles?

In a word, nostalgia. It's a chance to hear some of those great old songs again, recall when you first heard them and what lifetime memories they bring back, tap your toes, clap your hands and get up and dance again like you did that summer.

That's why Pacific Repertory Theatre's "The Roots of Rock 'N' Roll Tribute Concert," directed by Pac Rep artistic director Stephen Moorer with music direction by guitarist Don Dally, is bound to be a big, breezy hit this holiday season. And not only for the geezers such as me who remember all those old rock and soul songs, but, as evidenced by Saturday night's near-capacity crowd at The Golden Bough Theatre, a younger generation of music fan whose idea of the "roots of rock" probably goes back as far as, say, old-timers such as Green Day or Foo Fighters.

This is a tribute concert, after all, that kicks off in the late-'50s with Chuck Berry's classic "Johnny B. Goode," touches on doo-wop, '60s soul, Buddy Holly pop-rock, Elvis' blues-rock, girl-pop, country-soul and ends with the British Invasion, primarily The Beatles mid-'60s hits such as "She Loves You," "Can't Buy Me Love" and "Ticket to Ride."

Of course, a lot of these songs, "Shake, Rattle & Roll," "Tutti Frutti" and "Shout," to name a few, have been re-popularized lately through television commercials and on movie soundtracks, some even by hip, current artists. So, it's probably the perfect time to not only create a show with 30 popular hits of the '50s and '60s, but build it around Pac Rep's phenomenally successful tribute to Holly from last year: "Buddy! The Buddy Holly Story" and its star, Travis Poelle.

The charismatic Poelle once again channels Holly in four songs, but also does a pretty decent Elvis Presley (four songs) and Paul McCartney (11 songs, including two encore tunes, including a lovely solo acoustic version of "Yesterday").

Seeing Poelle go from the sexually charged Elvis and his swiveling hips to the squeaky-clean Holly, then morph into the twinkly-cute Paul persona (complete with the trademark cocked-

head move) is a revelation and a hoot.

Although very few of the performers in the show actually look or sound like the artists they're portraying, except for Poelle's Holly and Tim Biancalana's amazing, dead-on (sorry) impression of John Lennon's voice and looks, nobody in the enthusiastic audience seemed to mind.

After all, this show isn't about faithful re-creations, note-perfect impressions or even a comprehensive, true-to-history examination of the roots of rock 'n' roll (any tribute without the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Otis Redding -- oh, please stop me -- is seriously lacking).

This show, like the White Album Ensemble's performances of famous Beatles albums, is about the timelessness, the sheer fun and, yes, the nostalgia of the songs themselves.

Every song in this show is a gem -- many classic, unforgettable gems -- performed by a talented cast of singers with a lot of heart, soul and wit.





That cast includes Poelle and Biancalana, but also the soulful Daniel Simpson (doing Berry, Sam Cooke and a rousing, roof-raising version of the Isley Brothers' hits "Shout"), Charmaine Scott singing Marvelettes and Supremes songs, Lydia Lyons belting out Leslie Gore and Dusty Springfield tunes and bandmembers Luke Darnell (a wicked bass player to boot) and the hilarious drummer/singer/comedy relief David Shulz, doing Bill Haley, the Kinks and the Troggs and the Crew Cuts and Del Shannon, respectively.

By the time the show came to a close with a rousing three-song encore topped off by "Twist & Shout," the entire audience was on its feet, clapping, hooting and cheering like it was 1969.

And I'm sure many in the audience couldn't wait to get back home that night to go through their record -- er, CD -- collection to hear some of those good old rock 'n' roll songs all over again.

In fact, my guess is that next year Pac Rep will pull out "The Roots of Rock 'N' Roll Tribute Concert, Part II" with 30 new "old" songs. I wonder if Poelle can do Jagger?

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PERFORMANCE REVIEW  What: "The Roots of Rock 'N' Roll Tribute Concert"
 Where: Golden Bough Theatre, Monte Verde between 8th and 9th, Carmel  When: Continues at 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. and weekends through Sunday, Dec. 18; also at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 28, Thursday, Dec. 29 and Friday, Dec. 30; special 9 p.m. show Saturday, Dec. 31 includes dessert, champagne toast, concert and dancing  Tickets: \$22 to \$36 (discounts for seniors, students, children, teachers and active military); opening night \$55, New Year's Eve \$60. Call box office at 622-0100, or in-person at the Golden Bough Theatre from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Tues.-Sat. or online at www.pacrep.org