

Nudity all that's missing from Naples production of 'Hair'

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Shane Daniel Lord, left, and Ryan James rehearse a scene from "Hair." They'll all be strutting around onstage this week in the rock musical "Hair."

But they'll be strutting around with their clothes on, thank you very much.

The hippie rock musical is infamous for its brief nudity in the first act, but many U.S. productions choose to keep everything in their pants. This TheatreZone production falls firmly in that camp.

The nudity has a certain truth to it, admits director Mark Danni. The hippies, after all, often went in the buff at Woodstock or wherever else they happened to be.

But bare butts don't really add much else to the production, Danni says. "If it was important to the plot, I'd certainly do it. But it's not."

Besides, TheatreZone's G&L Theatre is a smaller, more intimate venue. The front row is just a few feet from the stage.

Danni laughs.

"Nobody wants a crotch in their face," he says.

Actor Ryan James certainly agrees. He plays Claude, the Oklahoma boy who's been drafted to go to Vietnam and isn't sure whether he should go or not.

James says he wouldn't mind getting buck-naked in a bigger, more anonymous hall like The Phil. But the G&L Theater is, shall we say, a bit more up-close-and-personal.

"You're like, 'Hi, my name's Ryan! Nice to meet you!'" he says and chuckles. "It's a lot more intimate."

Besides, quite frankly, the nudity is probably one of the least offensive things about the show, Danni says.

There's (fake) marijuana smoking onstage. Sex and curse words aplenty. And lots of anti-war sentiment.

Still, all that serves a poignant story about hippies, war and love, Danni says. He's loved "Hair" for decades now. He even played drums in the 25th anniversary tour of the show.

And, yes, true, there is lots of sex and drugs there. But the rock 'n' roll is the most important part of the equation.

The musical is chock-full of great songs such as "Aquarius," "Let the Sunshine In" and "Good Morning Starshine."

"Without the music," Danni says, "I don't really know what the show is." It's more than just a two-hour concert, of course. "Hair" has lots to say about friends and war and the '60s. Claude must choose between burning his draft card or going to Vietnam.

Aside from the draft, the situation in "Hair" is very similar to the one going on now, Danni says. Most obviously, you've got a second-term president leading an unpopular war.

"It kind of mirrors what's happening right now in America," James says. "Forty years later, it's the same feeling."

Danni says he's focused on staying true to the '60s, and that means avoiding hippie clichés and trying to get the costumes just right. There are peace symbols and tie-dye clothes, true, but Danni studied photos of hippies - circa 1968 - to make sure the other details are true to their source.

For costumes, they found a lot of clothes on eBay, including fringed jackets and leather moccasins. And some cast members, including Cape Coral actor Leo Wolfe, even grew their hair long for their roles.

"It has to be authentic," Danni says.

He isn't 100-percent sure Naples audiences are ready for "Hair." Even without the nudity.

Still, he figures most ticket-buyers know what they're in for. And, besides, it's too good of a musical NOT to do.

"I don't think people will be shocked," he says. "I think people know about the show, and they know what they're in for."

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