

"Hair"- Where were you in 1968?

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06/05/2008

The ground-breaking, whole-earth-shattering rock musical of all times. "Hair," is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of its opening on Broadway. (Yes, it's really been that long!) TheatreZone, Naples' only professional equity theatre, joins the celebration by staging the seminal production beginning June 12.

TheatreZone's Artistic Director, Mark Danni, was the percussionist on the 25th anniversary tour of the production and directs the current revival. "This play started my fascination with the late 60s. It spawned me to study the era-the summer of love, the Vietnam War. Everyone who was promoting peace was being shot.

"1968 was an incredible year, so monumental in so many ways. That one year defined an entire generation," Danni said. The play epitomized the vortex of shocking events that rocked the world- the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy assassinations, the anti-war movement, Black Power, the Tet offensive, the generation gap, the birth of the women's movement, sex, drugs and rock 'n roll.

Written by James Rado and Gerome Ragni, "Hair" tells the story of a tribe of hippies living in New York City, who are bucking the establishment, struggling for racial equality, sparking a sexual revolution and growing their hair long, as the lyrics from the title number suggest: "Flow it, show it, long as God can grow it, my hair..."

The play also broke from theatre tradition by including nudity and inviting audiences to participate in a "be-in" finale. "When 'Hair' debuted, everyone thought Broadway had stooped to its lowest standards. It was really snubbed by the theatrical industry and didn't win any Tony awards that year," Danni said.

Since then, Hair has become a huge financial success, playing worldwide, winning awards and still remaining relevant today. The score, composed by Galt MacDermot, contains chart-topping hits such as "(This is the) Age of Aquarius," "Let the Sunshine In," "Good Morning Starshine" and "Easy To Be Hard."

MacDermot, now in his 80s, but still a vital and prolific composer, explained why the play continues to be so popular, saying, "It was a breakthrough in a certain way. It called for freedom; a freedom beyond what we usually needed-complete freedom. Let the sunshine in, as they say. I think that appeals to people.

"And also the 60s, when people were beginning to change, it was a very adventurous time." MacDermot's musical style was influenced by his time spent in Capetown, South Africa, studying African drumming.

He said, "Rhythm is a major part of American music." That could account for why "Hair's" tunes are now part of the mainstay of American culture. But "Hair" was about not trusting anybody over the age of 30, and at the time, MacDermot was well past that mark.

"They didn't trust them, but they did use them. I was 37 and they needed a composer," he said. Needless to say, the show contains mature language and subject matter. Information: 1-888-ZONE-FL.