



May 19, 2008

## The real dreamgirl

### Original Motown diva brings it

By **DAVID SCHMEICHEL**

Eat your heart out, Dreamgirls.

Chalk it up to coincidence, but last night's concert hall show by former Motown sensation Diana Ross took place just one day after curtains fell on MTC's stage production of Dreamgirls, Broadway's "re-imagining" of the rise and fall (and rise again) of girl-group trailblazers The Supremes.

And even though Dreamgirls serves as a perfectly decent primer on Ross' early days (super-sappy showtunes notwithstanding), only the original diva herself could do justice to such an incredible career.

Lucky for the 1,700 fans in attendance last night, Ross -- looking impossibly well-preserved, and still capable of telegraphing a lifetime's worth of emotion just by batting her eyelashes -- did not disappoint, hitting all the right notes while showcasing tunes from both the Supremes' era and her later stint as a solo star.

Nor were fans hoping to catch a glimpse of Ross in all her glamour-girl splendour disappointed -- by our count, the singer managed to shoehorn six or seven costume changes into a show that barely lasted 80 minutes.

Making her grand entrance in a gold-flecked red lame gown -- and an appropriately decadent red wrap -- Ross opened with her '80s megahit I'm Coming Out (never let it be said she doesn't have a sense of humour), dropping the diva-facade for only a moment to ensure her platform shoes weren't going to cause her to fall down the stairs.



(Marcel Cretain/Sun Media)

"I'm going to do a song from the good old days -- remember this one?" she then asked cheekily, before launching into a medley of Supremes hits that included My World is Empty Without You, Where Did Our Love Go, Baby Love and Stop! In the Name of Love.

Several decades have past since the Supremes first cut those singles, but Ross's trademark singing style -- high-pitched, reedy, and achingly vulnerable -- has survived without a scratch.

So, too, has her penchant for playing to the crowd, as she made clear by making goo-goo eyes at the lucky folks up front, or -- later in the show -- when she traded dance moves with one especially enthusiastic fan.

Oh, and did we mention the costume changes? After wrapping up Touch Me in the Morning and Love Hangover, Ross made a beeline backstage, leaving her ace seven-piece band to vamp until she returned in a gauzy white get-up to sing The Boss and It's My House.

She donned a striking silver ensemble for Love Child -- an already gritty track that gained even more muscle thanks to a funky Latin percussion break -- Upside Down and Ease on Down the Road, then slipped into a risqué peekaboo number for the jazz numbers Fine and Mellow and Don't Explain, songs that helped earn her an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Billie Holiday in Lady Sings the Blues.

Ross' most recent album was referenced with a cover of the Frankie Lymon classic Why Do Fools Fall in Love (and later, an encore version of the title track) but Ross, by now attired in a feathery black wrap, closed the show proper with two of her best-known hits: The Theme from Mahogany (Do You Know Where You're Going To) and Ain't No Mountain High Enough, before returning for a fierce cover of Gloria Gaynor's disco anthem I Will Survive.

Leave it to a diva of Diana's calibre to end on a high note.

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4 stars

Diana Ross

Where: Centennial Concert Hall

When: Sun., May 18