



# DUAL CRITICS REVIEW: MAMMA MIA! AT THEATRE JACKSONVILLE

👤 Dick Kerekes & Leisla Sansom 📅 June 11, 2018 📁 Dual Critics, Feature, On Stage, San Marco, Theatre, Theatre Reviews 👁 794 Views

FRI  
08  
JUN

SUN  
24

FEATURED

## MAMMA MIA!

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY BENNY ANDERSSON AND BJORN ULVAEUS

🕒 8:00 pm - 11:00 pm (24) 📍 Theatre Jacksonville

The phenomenal musical “Mamma Mia!” danced its way onto Theatre Jacksonville’s stage on Friday, June 8th, 2018, where it will remain until the final performance — a matinee — on Sunday, June 24th. Call 904-396-4425 or visit [theatrejax.com](http://theatrejax.com) for reservations. The production is being sponsored by Industry West, a home furnishings company featuring modern design, with a newly opened store in San Marco Square.

We describe “Mamma Mia!” as phenomenal for three reasons. First, the production is a jukebox musical which debuted in 1999 and was built around the songs of ABBA, a Swedish pop group which was immensely popular in the 1970s. Catherine Johnson, a British playwright, licensed over twenty songs written by ABBA songwriters Benny Anderson and Bjorn Ulvaeus, and then faced the challenge of how best to use them. “Write a musical revue? Hmm — audiences generally like musicals with a little plot — so I’ll add one!”

The show’s track record is our second reason for describing it as something special. After opening in London’s West End, the show has played in over fifty countries and grossed over two billion dollars. It opened on Broadway in 2001, where it remained for fourteen years and almost six thousand performances before closing in 2015. A 2008 film starring Meryl Streep grossed over six hundred million dollars worldwide, and in the United States, the DVD of the film made millions of dollars on the first day of the sale.

Our third reason for calling the show phenomenal was TJ’s packed house on opening night. The audience

laughed loudly and applauded wildly throughout the evening. Intermission was a gigantic meet and greet in the aisles and lobby.

The action takes place on a Greek Island in 1999, where Donna Sheridan owns a modest hotel. She has lived there for the past twenty-one years, after giving up her role as the lead singer of “Donna and the Dynamos,” a disco trio. Donna is portrayed by Kacy Hope, a talented newcomer to Jacksonville’s stages, who recently moved here from Vermont. Her resume includes stage appearances in several major roles; she also directed a production of “Chicago.” Her vibrant performance as Donna was filled with emotion and humor.

Sophie (Shauna Clark), the daughter Donna has raised as a single mother, is twenty years old, and is preparing to marry Sky (Ricky Sharp), her attractive and sensible fiancé. Sophie is played by the perky and lovely Shauna Clark in her TJ debut. She is well known locally for musical theatre performances, which include roles in “Urinetown,” “Hairspray,” and “Aida.”

While Sophie wants a traditional wedding with her father giving her away, Donna has never revealed her father’s name. Sophie has read an old diary written by her mother, found she had affairs with three different men prior to her birth, and secretly invited all three to the wedding, hoping to discover her father’s identity.

The three men playing Donna’s past lovers are local actors who have all recently appeared in major roles at other theaters. Veteran performer Bill Ratliff, who appears as the architect Sam Carmichael, recently played the lead in “Man of La Mancha” at ABET. Blake Osner plays the free-spirited Bill Austin and recently co-starred in “Red, White and Tuna” at ABET. Rich Pintello is London banker Harry Bright and was in Phase: Eight’s rollicking version of “Noises Off.”

Donna has invited two friends, musical performers from her younger days, to her daughter’s wedding. Tanya (Sara Beth Gerard-Summers), now an outspoken wealthy woman with three past divorces, wears the most expensive and stylish dresses in the show. Felecia Ewing as Rosie rounds out the singers with her powerful voice. The trio displayed their talents with the rousing “Money, Money, Money” and “Dancing Queen.”

You can perhaps imagine what follows. The three men have a joint confrontation, singing appropriate ABBA songs. Donna and the men have individual confrontations, singing ABBA songs. We don’t do spoilers, so we’re not revealing the ending.

If you aren't familiar with the music, don't worry, it has a good beat and you will be toe tapping. You can also understand all the lyrics! The play is filled with comedy and we laughed a lot. You get a list of all the songs in the program; we recognized a number of them. The best song is "The Winner Takes It All" belted out by Donna

The trio responsible for the talent on stage could not have been better. Shirley Sacks Kirby, who teaches theatre at Stanton College Preparatory and has directed many outstanding musicals throughout North Florida, adds another wonderful credit to her resume. Curtis J. Williams is certainly Jacksonville's Mr. Choreographer for his many fantastic shows in this area. Erin Barnes, the Musical Director, also leads the orchestra on the piano and synthesizer along with Luis Ocasio (Percussion), David Ott (Guitar), and Lee Wolf (Bass).

In featured roles are Karen Watson (Ali), Samantha Powell (Lisa), James Demps (Pepper), Brandon Kraut (Eddie), and Neal Thorburn (Father Alexandros).

The incredible ensemble includes Jacob Piking, Stephen Fennell, Kendal Berry, Carolyn Lok, Bella Clements, Kristen Oliver, Karen Coughlin, and Sequan Curry. The ensemble makes for a compelling evening in this high octane production. They will surprise you with their commitment to comedy combined with deadpan earnestness.

Scenic and Lighting Designer Tim Watson's two-story buildings are striking and, combined with the many costumes by Audrey Wagner, transport the audience to a Greek paradise.

Tickets are selling fast; so reserve quickly.