Beautiful
The Carole King Musical

Book by
Douglas McGrath

Words and Music by
Gerry Goffin & Carole King
Barry Mann & Cynthia Weil

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YOU’RE BEAUTIFUL AS YOU FEEL
by Ben Fong-Torres

Watching *Beautiful - The Carole King Musical*, and reveling in the remarkable music that she composed, with and without former husband and partner Gerry Goffin, I was reminded of one of the ones that got away.

I get asked, now and again, about interviews I wish I’d been able to score at *Rolling Stone*, but didn’t. Elvis comes to mind. So does Sinatra. And then there’s Carole King.

She should’ve been a snap. Unlike The King and the Chairman, Carole was in L.A. and accessible to us; she was one of us. A pop music phenomenon out of the early Sixties; a pioneer singer-songwriter in the ’70s; a resident of good ol’ Laurel Canyon, which produced a good number of the musicians and behind-the-scenesters we chronicled in *Rolling Stone*: The Byrds, the Doors, the Mamas and the Papas, Crosby Stills & Nash, Frank Zappa, Lou Adler (producer of King’s
greatest hit album, *Tapestry*). You name them; they were there, and they were ours.

But King eluded us for years – six, in fact, after the release of *Tapestry* in 1971. Other artists who generally shied from media met with *Rolling Stone*. Miles Davis, Van Morrison, Linda Ronstadt, Bob Dylan. Even Janis Joplin, who felt betrayed by what she considered her “hometown paper” – when *Rolling Stone* was based in San Francisco – with its critical reviews of her work, tracked me down late one night to talk, on the phone, about her latest doings.

Not Carole King. As much as her record label and others around her may have counseled her to take advantage of the press, for promotional purposes, she resisted. In the early ‘70s, at the height of her success with *Tapestry* and its string of hit singles – “It’s Too Late,” “I Feel the Earth Move,” “So Far Away” – the privacy of her life – a complicated one, as it turned out – was her highest priority.
So, as the music editor of the magazine, I was disappointed. Growing up, I loved her songs and appreciated the wit and craft that went into them, both music and words. Goffin and King; Leiber and Stoller; Pomus and Schuman, Mann and Weil. They were sure things.

I would probably have assigned the Carole King interview to myself, and happily added her to the list of songwriting artists I’d profiled, including Paul McCartney, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Elton John, Bonnie Raitt, Smokey Robinson, James Taylor, Jackie DeShannon, Neil Diamond, Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, Crosby Stills & Nash, and Barry Mann. Yes, the Mann who along with wife Cynthia Weil are depicted in *Beautiful* as King and Goffin’s real-life buddies and songwriting rivals. (Formidable ones, too. “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling,” anybody?)

These artists made the music I grew up with. Especially Goffin and King, whose credits I would notice on my 45 RPM records. “Will
You Love Me Tomorrow” for the Shirelles. “Take Good Care of My Baby” and other hits for that echo of Buddy Holly, Bobby Vee; “One Fine Day” for the Chiffons; “Up on the Roof” for the Drifters. “The Loco-Motion,” of course, for their baby sitter. I also love the song King wrote with Howie Greenfield: “Crying in the Rain.” Gorgeously sad, as performed by the Everly Brothers. Goffin and King wrote enough hits to fill a Top 40 survey on their own.

Watching Beautiful, I saw the story I could have written – only without the splashy, flashy renditions of all those great pop nuggets that King and her pals created. And without script writer Douglas McGrath’s flair for comedy and drama.

In my article, just as it is on Broadway, the focus would have been on King and Goffin’s music, and the unwritten rules they broke. “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” a smash hit for the Shirelles in 1961, was the first song about premarital sex – the early ‘60s phrase for a hookup.
Before it hit the stage, *Beautiful* was labeled a “jukebox musical,” a pejorative that classified it with numerous previous productions that sought to attract Baby Boomers by giving them dressed up oldies, stitched together with a threadbare story line – often fictional – or no story at all.

*Jersey Boys*, the musical story of the Four Seasons, broke that mold; redefined that term. The Four Seasons’ hits drove the production, certainly, but so did an engaging story about how the group formed, succeeded, fell apart, and came to terms. Four seasons.

*Beautiful* follows in that welcomed new direction. As McGrath told me, he worked to feature King and Goffin’s songs “in the context of their personal story.” So, go ahead and call it a jukebox musical. But music lovers of a certain age will remember that the jukebox was a marvelous thing, an invitingly lit vault of their favorite tunes, theirs at the drop of a coin. And, as one critic noted, in *The Huffington Post*, *Beautiful* does something more than spit out the hits.
The performers, he wrote, “have populated Beautiful with well-defined characters with relatable human foibles.” And, as the New York Times’ critic noted, writing about the title song: “She delivers something you don’t expect from a jukebox musical. That’s a complex, revitalizing portrait of how a very familiar song came into existence, and of the real, conflicted person within the reluctant star.”

Long before Beautiful hit Broadway, Carole King made it clear that she would not take an active role in its production. After her daughter and manager, Sherry Kondor, saw early readings and convinced her mother that she should give it a chance, she agreed to attend a reading with her. Carole didn’t stay past the first act. “I can’t watch my life like this,” she told Sherry.

In a note to me for an article I wrote for the San Francisco Chronicle, before Beautiful opened a pre-Broadway run in town, King explained, “I had to leave...because the excellence of the writing and the actors’
interpretation awakened long-buried emotions.” But, she concluded, it was a good play, “and I knew I couldn’t stand in its way… and now I give Beautiful my blessing.”

In doing so, she allowed Beautiful to happen; she even spoke with McGrath to give him her recollections, even as she was putting them down for her own memoirs.

Beautiful turns out to be not only about King. It’s also about the music of those times in the early ‘60s, when younger people were beginning to write their own songs. It’s about the way that music was created, performed and sold, and about what it meant to an entire generation.

It’s not a surprise, and quite all right that King initially stayed away from “The Carole King Musical,” from her own story. Her choice is part of that story. But when she did sneak into the Broadway Theatre one evening, she found that Beautiful is more than one of her songs; more than the wonderful, albeit sometimes painful, story of a talented young
composer who epitomized some of the best and most significant qualities of her times. That it is, in fact, rather beautiful.

**Ben Fong-Torres**, former senior editor at Rolling Stone, has published ten books. He is senior editor at Qello Concerts, writes the radio column at the San Francisco Chronicle and is a Sunday DJ on BossBossRadio.
MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE

SO FAR AWAY
Carole King

OH CAROL
Neil Sedaka

1650 BROADWAY MEDLEY
Ensemble

IT MIGHT AS WELL RAIN UNTIL SEPTEMBER
Carole King

BE-BOP-A-LULA
Ensemble

SOME KIND OF WONDERFUL
Carole King, Gerry Goffin, and The Drifters

HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN
Cynthia Weil

TAKE GOOD CARE OF MY BABY
Gerry Goffin and Carole King

WHO PUT THE BOMP
Barry Mann
WILL YOU LOVE ME TOMORROW  
Carole King

HE’S SURE THE BOY I LOVE  
Cynthia Weil and Barry Mann

WILL YOU LOVE ME TOMORROW  
The Shirelles

UP ON THE ROOF  
Gerry Goffin and The Drifters

ON BROADWAY  
The Drifters

THE LOCOMOTION  
Little Eva and Ensemble

YOU’VE LOST THAT LOVIN FEELING  
Barry Mann and The Righteous Brothers

ONE FINE DAY  
Janelle, Backing Singers and Carole King
ACT TWO

CHAINS
Carole King and Ensemble

WALKING IN THE RAIN
Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil

PLEASANT VALLEY SUNDAY
Marilyn Wald, Gerry Goffin and Ensemble

WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE
Barry Mann

WILL YOU LOVE ME TOMORROW (REPRISE)
Carole King

UPTOWN
Uptown Singer and Ensemble

IT’S TOO LATE
Carole King

YOU’VE GOT A FRIEND
Carole King, Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, and Donnie Kirshner

(YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE) A NATURAL WOMAN Carole King and Ensemble

BEAUTIFUL
Carole King
LONDON COMPANY

CAROLE KING
Cassidy Janson

GERRY GOFFIN
Alan Morrissey

BARRY MANN
Ian McIntosh

CYNTHIA WEIL
Lorna Want

GENIE KLEIN
Diane Keen

DONNIE KIRSHNER
Gary Trainor

ENSEMBLE

RIGHTeous BROTHER - BILL MEDLEY /
NEIL SEDAKA / LOU ADLER
Gavin Alex

RIGHTeous BROTHER -
BOBBY HATFIELD / NICK
Matt Nalton
DRIFTER
Dom Hartley-Harris

DRIFTER
Leo Ihenacho

DRIFTER
Earl R. Perkins

DRIFTER
Jay Perry

BETTY
Joanna Woodward

Marilyn
Vivien Carter

Shirellee / Uptown Singer
Hannah Jay-Allan

Little Eva / Shirellee
Sharon Rose

Janelle / Shirellee
Tanisha L. Spring

Lucille / Shirellee – Shirley
Danielle Steers
SWINGS

SWING
Ashford Campbell

SWING
Matthew Colthart

SWING
Jammy Kasongo

SWING
David O’Mahony

SWING
Chanice Alexander-Burnett

SWING
Koko Basigara

SWING
Rosie Heath

SWING
Leigh Lothian
UNDERSTUDIES

For CAROLE KING
Joanna Woodward, Vivien Carter, Leigh Lothian

For GERRY GOFFIN
Matt Nalton, David O’Mahony

For BARRY MANN
Matthew Colthart, David O’Mahony

For CYNTHIA WEIL
Vivien Carter, Rosie Heath

For GENIE KLEIN
Vivien Carter, Leigh Lothian

For DONNIE KIRSHNER
David O’Mahony, Gavin Alex