

# Stop! in the name of good taste, Mary

By JOHN MABRY

The story of the Supremes, one of the most successful groups in rock history, is, by now, a legend — three young, black girls from the Detroit projects sing and dance their way to the top of the pop charts and into America's hearts.

In her 1986 autobiography, *Dreamgirl*, former Supremes member Mary Wilson revealed some of the nasty goings-on behind the fairy tale — the manipulation of Motown artists by then-president Berry Gordy, the cutthroat behavior of lead singer Diana Ross, and, of course, the tragic fall of Florence Ballard, the Supreme who became a martyr to many fans when she died on welfare at the age of 32.

After reading *Supreme Faith* (\$19.95, HarperCollins Publishers),

Wilson's 1990 follow-up, however, it is obvious that Wilson should have stopped with the first book.

What *Supreme Faith* lacks is exactly what made *Dreamgirl* the most successful autobiography in music-publishing history — information not about Wilson, who only sang "oohs and ahhs" behind Ross's lead vocals and little else, but an insider's look at other more notorious artists behind the trademark "Motown Sound."

*Supreme Faith*, however, focuses primarily on Wilson's failed marriage and her futile efforts to keep the group alive after Ross left in 1970.

But, let's face it, Mary — most people probably don't remember:  
1. your name, and  
2. that the Supremes continued

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into the '70s (the group had only a handful of meager hits after Ross left).

Throughout the book, however, Wilson acknowledges the Ross-less Supremes as successful, and herself as talented. But, considering her musical track record, she is clearly not the star she'd like you to think she is. Wilson, in fact, has never sung lead vocals on a hit single.

To read a book written from such a disillusioned and entirely incorrect perspective can get to be, quite frankly, annoying.

For instance, the first paragraph in the liner of the book reads, "*Supreme Faith* begins in 1970... While

Ross has only one Top-10 hit in the next four years, the Supremes (now with Jean Terrell) see hit after hit..."

Wrong, again. Diana Ross hit Billboard's #1 position with "Ain't No Mountain High" in 1970 and the same position in 1973 with "Touch Me In The Morning." Wilson also forgot to mention the fact that during this time period Ross made a hit movie and was nominated for an Academy Award.

When Wilson finally has to admit the failure of the new Supremes, she, in true fashion, blames it on Berry Gordy's failure to promote their records, not on a lack of talent.

When Wilson discusses more notorious artists than herself, as she did most of the time in *Dreamgirl*, the book becomes more interesting. Wilson's favorite topic in *Supreme*

*Faith*, as it was in *Dreamgirl*, Diana Ross, or Diane, as she calls her in the books.

While *Dreamgirl* confirmed what people had long suspected about Ross — that she could be a manipulative, conniving person — Wilson's description of Ross' antics in *Supreme Faith* now come as no surprise.

Although Wilson insists that she still loves Ross, it is obvious that Wilson is resentful of Ross for leaving the group and has no qualms about capitalizing on it.

No one likes a bad loser, and my prediction for *Supreme Faith* is that no one is going to like it, either.

And while *Dreamgirl* is an interesting book, Mary Wilson's latest effort is proof that she's simply run out of names to drop.

# Problems distract 'Monique' audience from thrills

By JOHN MABRY

Lackluster performances from a brassy script make StageCenter's production of the mystery/thriller "Monique" a less-than-thrilling evening of theater.

The first disappointment is not in the acting, but set designer Scott Bagley's living-room set, or the lack thereof.

Unfinished edges, doors that do not shut properly and intermittent wall trim are defects that not only make the set extremely unappealing, but are distracting as well. For instance, the audience can clearly see straight through a set of double doors to a white sheet that draped the backstage area.

And not only does the acting space itself look bad, the furnishings selected obviously conflict with the late 1950s French setting.

While the costumes suggest the period, the set looks like a mixture between early-'70s craft overdose and Hallmark watercolor stationery; electric purple and bright blue walls hung with such 1950s items as a brown macramé owl and woven paper-plate holders.

The wooden-framed sofa's cushions are beige and decorated with big flowers in various earth tones. About as French as apple pie and baseball.

Bagley's lighting? Imagine the mentioned scene washed in a dim yellow haze. That, I think, speaks for itself.

To add to the anachronisms, director Charles Pitman chooses to play period show music like Steely Dan's "Do It Again" and Phil Collins' "In the Air."

If I hadn't known beforehand that "Monique" takes place in the 1950s, I would have placed the time of the action somewhere between the moon landing and disco.

Set, lighting and music, of course, are theatrical elements long forgotten when the acting in a production is operating at full force.

Most of the performances in "Monique," however, only emphasize the technical shortcomings.

Although he looks every bit the Frenchman, Dwight Scott Miller's portrayal of Fernand Ravinel, the principal character, just isn't strong enough to carry the play.

Although his character goes through turbulent emotional

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changes — disgust, burning passion, guilt, fear — Miller chooses to be quietly worried throughout the entire play. Instead of creating empathy for Fernand's situation, Miller's deflated performance makes it quite difficult to discard him as a mere wimp.

And although his nervous, agitated performance is appropriate in certain scenes, it greatly hinders his believability in others.

Miller's flatness in the beginning of the play does little to convince us that he is so overly consumed with his flaming desire for Monique that he would actually go so far as to murder his wife.

The biggest disappointment of the evening, however, is Doree Fackler's performance as the murdered wife, Lucienne.

Fackler has some of the best written material to work with in the play but she never comes close to living up to her character's tremendous potential.

The witty, saucy Lucienne, is not given an ounce of life by Fackler. So many remarkable opportunities for laughter are completely passed by. Instead of being colorful, Fackler appears as if she is merely reading the lines off of a teleprompter.

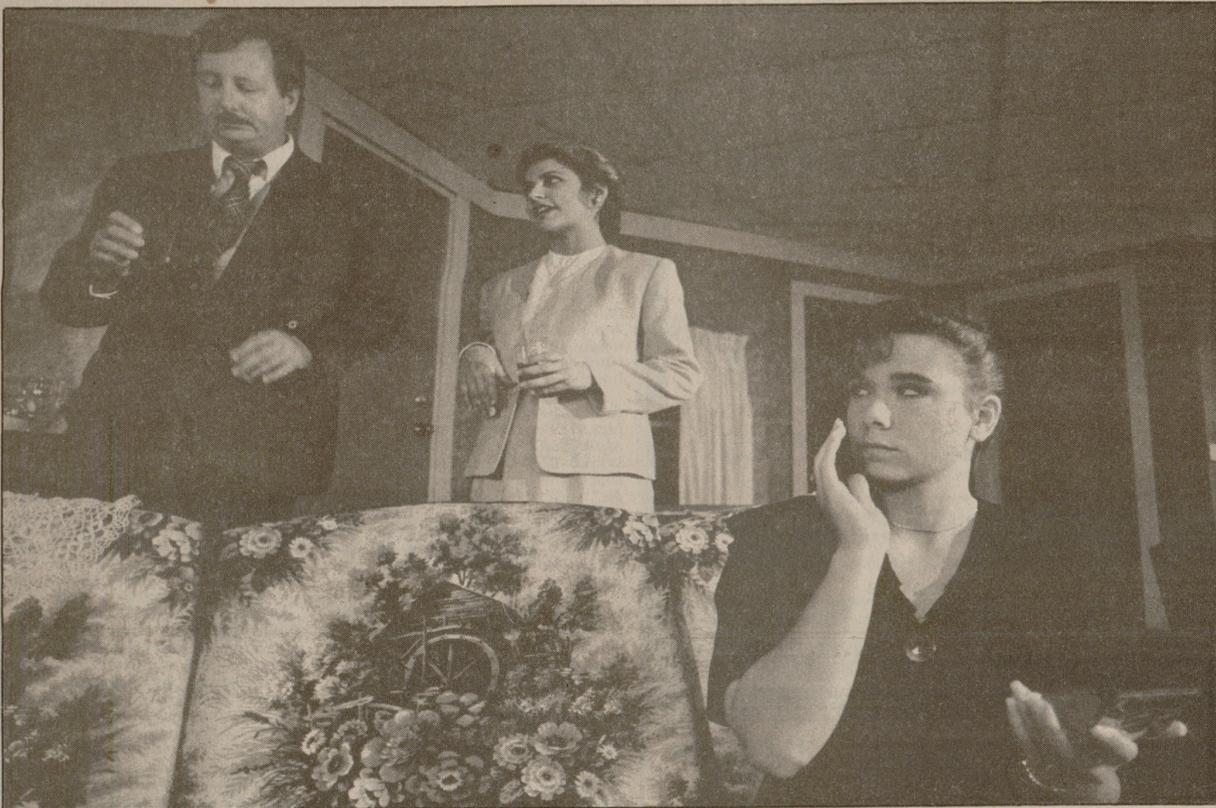
Danyah Arafat's Monique, however, is as refreshing as Fackler's Lucienne is stale.

Arafat, clearly the most outstanding thing about "Monique," is a joy to watch whether she is barking at Fernand like a watchdog or lounging seductively cat-like on the sofa.

Clearly establishing the sirenical Monique right off the bat, Arafat manages to do the one thing that most of other actors seemed to forget — make specific character choices. While Arafat is in control, the others seem lost and out of focus. And although she is short, Arafat's command of her body and voice manages to elevate her above the others.

The two exceptions are Laura Egg, who plays the neighbor girl, Lisette, and Harold Presley, who gives a great performance as the suspicious Inspector Merlin. The one scene between him and Arafat is the most convincing in the play.

But both Egg and Presley have minor roles, and, unfortunately, the play drags



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/The Battalion

Ferdinand (Dwight Scott Miller) and Monique (Danyah Arafat) scheme in the presence of his wife (Doree Fackler) during StageCenter's presentation of "Monique" in Bryan.

This problem is only exacerbated by many of Pitman's directorial choices.

One example is the long scene when Monique and Fernand carry Lucienne's corpse from room to room. Although much of the scene is played in silence, the stage time is made even more lengthy by Pitman's failure to fill

the time with bits of stage business to keep the audience's attention. Often Pitman even leaves the stage completely empty.

There are, in addition, two other minor problems with "Monique." The first is that actors who are no longer on stage are allowed to view the remainder of the play from the audience area.

This is a real no-no, especially in plays of a more serious nature such as "Monique."

The second problem is an inconsistency in the sound effects. The sound from the telephone onstage comes from the phone itself and later from the speakers. Also, the fact that voices on the other end of telephone conversations

are amplified is unnecessary and distracting.

"Monique," as a result, delivers none of the mystery or suspense that the script does have great potential for. The majority of the actors simply don't actualize their characters, and, as a result, "Monique" is a thriller that thrills no one.

# Baillie, Reba reign in Rollie while Gill sputters in concert

By JOHN RIGHTER

Strike one up for the ladies. Although Vince Gill sputtered through Sunday night's MSC Town Hall performance, Reba McEntire and Kathie Baillie provided plenty of substance and flash for the three-quarters full G. Rollie White audience.

RCA/BMG artists Baillie and the Boys started Sunday's triad (a miscast of positions). I first heard Baillie and the Boys last fall during their performance with Restless Heart, a set that upstaged the night's headliners. By evening's end, Kathie Baillie and husband/guitarist Michael Bonagura had successfully defended their crown.

Two things stand out in Baillie/Bonagura's songs: they write most of their material (unlike McEntire), and while the songs are personal, the subject matter is neither wishy washy nor blindly conventional. With songs such as "I Can't Turn The Tide" and "She Deserves You," Baillie offers an unsuperficial approach to an area that has long pandered to the static black and white notions of "isn't love swell" and "there's an empty bottle staring back at me."

Obviously, the audience agreed. Baillie and the Boys received a standing ovation at the end of its set, a feat unmatched by Gill and applied somewhat obligatory toward Reba. Baillie's gutsy deliveries and natural rapport, especially during the acoustic "Treat Me Like A Stranger," retain enough of the simplicity that makes conventional country so endearing, yet injects aspects of a more progressive-pop approach. In this case, Baillie provides the best of both worlds.

Country Music Association Single of the Year winner Vince Gill failed to provide as smooth a transition to McEntire. Gill never quite recovered from an awkward beginning (an awkwardness that resurfaced in his butchering of "Oklahoma Swing" during McEntire's set), mumbling about Oklahoma and the audience's

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subsequent hissing.

Interestingly, although Gill won his award for a ballad, "When I Call Your Name" (a surprisingly weak number for a CMA winner), it was the faster-paced, dance hall-swing numbers, such as "Everybody's Sweetheart" and "Turn Me Loose," that went over best.

Part of Gill's awkwardness might be a result of a shift from more intimate settings to larger audiences; a factor propelled by the CMA award. An entertainer's role within a club-like setting is vastly different from that of a predominantly gimmick-oriented arena setting. Intimacy and spontaneity take a back seat to isolation and choreography.

The award must also have been the logic behind Gill's positioning after Baillie and the Boys, who nevertheless severely upstaged the ex-Pure Prairie League singer.

Performing a tight, choreographed set, McEntire closed the evening with an abrupt, hour- and five-minute performance. Focusing, especially the second half of the set, on material from her latest release, *Rumor Has It*, she opened in semi-dramatic fashion with "Climb That Mountain High," utilizing fog, lights and an extended platform.

From there McEntire intermixed ballads such as "You Lie" and "One Promise Too Late" with jazzier, choreographed numbers, including Otis Redding's "RESPECT," the traditional, Bobby Gentry-penned "Fancy," and "Walk On" from '89's *Sweet Sixteen*.

Although McEntire is more revered for her ballads, it was mostly the uptempo numbers that demonstrated

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ERIC H. ROALSON/The Battalion

Reba McEntire responds to the G. Rollie White crowd after Baillie and the Boys got them to their feet at a Town Hall concert.