

Recreating a pop icon

Dusty: the original pop diva

Samuel Spurr
Review

The life of pop music icon Dusty Springfield is brought to the big stage in a high-energy musical that neatly encapsulates her turbulent life. Her hair, make-up, style, friends, lovers, family and voice are captured remarkably.

The production chronicles the life of Dusty Springfield, whose real name was Mary O'Brien, from her home in West Hampstead, London, to Memphis and from the highs of pop music superstardom to the lows of alcohol addiction.

Beginning in 1979 the show retroactively looks at her life, starting with her teenage years surrounded by a music-loving family in 1950s England. Dusty's teenage persona returns throughout the story, offering advice and insights for the star in times of self doubt and insecurity.

The show delves poignantly into her battle with alcoholism and her fight with cancer that eventually claimed her life in 1999.

The best and worst of Dusty is brought to life in this musical completely created, financed, produced and performed by Australians. The three writers of the Johnny O'Keefe musical *Shout!* – John-Michael Howson, David Mitchell and Melvyn Morrow – have in *Dusty* again written another fabulous musical.

Tamsin Carroll's role as Dusty is phenomenal, with each of the pop diva's classic songs performed brilliantly. *I Only Want To Be With You* gets the pulse racing from the opening curtain. Her past theatre credits include the roles of Sheila in *Hair*, Rose Alvarez in *Bye Bye Birdie* and Marianne Renate in *Shout!*, making Tamsin an obvious choice to play the role of Dusty.



The "White Lady Of Soul" ...Tamsin Carroll plays Dusty.

"Reno", Dusty's love interest played by Deni Hines, reveals the side of Dusty that she attempted to keep away from the prying eyes of the UK's tabloids. Deni performs admirably, with an expected strong vocal performance. More opportunities to hear her voice would have added to the sense of "soul" that Dusty is portrayed as aiming for in her career. Mitchell Butel, Dusty's stylist Rodney, receives plenty of applause for his hilarious performance, providing Dusty with an upside to all her predicaments.

The supporting cast, made up of Glenn Butcher, Kaye Tuckerman and Trisha Noble, provides an endearing, yet brief glimpse of the world surrounding Dusty in her youth and as a major 1960's icon. Alexis Fishman, in her professional debut as the plain yet confident teenaged Mary O'Brien, performs with high energy and zest.

Chronicling the sounds, personalities and lifestyle of the 1960s, *Dusty* ensures the baby boomers and fans of that era are satiated. Music by Pete Townsend, Burt Bacharach and Marvin Gaye,

together with references to Diana Ross, Lulu and other contemporary performers, immerses the audience into an era of music where black soul and white pop merged to cross international boundaries on the music charts. A threadbare stage for most scenes seems forgotten due to plenty of pizzazz in the costume choices, evoking the best and worst of the 1960s.

Dusty is a non-stop, shoe-tapping, get-out-of-your-seat-and-dance production.

Dusty is playing now at the Lyric Theatre, Star City, Sydney.