

THEATER

Review: Playhouse's million dollar performance of quartet jam session that made history

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DENNIS – “Million Dollar Quartet,” now rocking on stage at The Cape Playhouse through July 6, is a smashing jukebox musical that recounts a real-life jam session that took place on Dec. 4, 1956, in the tiny recording studio of Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee.

On that day, studio owner Sam Phillips played host to an unplanned get-together by a quartet of four talented young rockers: Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins, who happened to drop by the studio and ended up recording their particular brand of energy and color in a group session that mixed rock, gospel and country sounds.

“Quartet” is a great reminder of some of the reasons we love this form of theater – for the pure enjoyment of immersion in the energy on stage, clapping or singing along, shouting out a call-and-response to “See You Later, Alligator,” or just joining in the sound level, looking for more.

Name of show: “Million Dollar Quartet”

Book by Floyd Mutrux and Colin Escott, directed by Hunter Foster, performed at Cape Playhouse.



What it's about: This giant celebration of rock 'n' roll is a grand revue of more than 20 blockbuster numbers that reflected the raw talents of the four young musicians who were newly exploding into the American musical consciousness. There's plenty of variety to spread around, from numbers whose reverb literally causes the floor to rumble under your feet – “Brown Eyed Handsome Man,” “Great Balls of Fire” or “Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On” – to Johnny Cash immortals like “I Walk the Line,” “Ghost Riders in the Sky” and “Sixteen Tons,” or the mellow harmonies of “Peace in the Valley” and “I Shall Not Be Moved.”

See it or not: How could you not? Go. Enjoy. Fall into nostalgia, or hear these rock 'and 'n' roll numbers for the first time. And it's not just vocals. Believe it or not, this is no recording, and there's no hidden backup band. Every uncanny piano feat, every guitar riff, is played by the musicians themselves, an amazing display of musical skill not to be missed.

Highlights: The over-the-top talents displayed by the “quartet” of Alessandro Gian Viviano (Presley), Scott Moreau (Cash), Nat Zegree (Lewis) and Jeremy Sevelovitz (Perkins) do much more than justice to the four outsize talents they’re re-creating, including not only vocals but the mannerisms, style and personal quirks of each individual personality. These big egos butt up against each other, but they also meld together in their enthusiasm for great rock ‘n’ roll.

Added to the glitz of the four headliners are the mind-boggling talents of bass player Nathan Yates Douglass (as “Brother Jay”) and drummer Matt Spencer (playing “Fluke”). Douglass is electrifying in the way he commands that bass, whether it’s upside-down or right side up.

The great female vocals belong to Megan Reinking, as Dyanne, Elvis’ girlfriend of the time.

Interesting fact: This musical also becomes a play through the talents of Chance Michael Wall, whose character of Sam Phillips is a kind of narrator, weaving together the personal stories of his four musicians, stopping the action with freeze frames in order to share a fact or anecdote that adds to the personal drama of their lives, as each searches for his path to fame.

Worth noting: Does Hunter Foster’s name sound familiar? Here’s why: In addition to his many talents as a director of numerous shows, both in regional theater and off-Broadway, Foster also served as guest artistic director at Cape Playhouse during the 2023 season. Other Playhouse shows he has directed in the past include “Cabaret,” “My Fair Lady,” “The Foreigner,” “Once,” a 2023 production of “Million Dollar Quartet” and “Clue.”

One more thing: If you go: “Million Dollar Quartet” is at Cape Playhouse, Route 6A, Dennis Village, through July 6. Performances are 7:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, with 2 p.m. matinees on June 22, 26 and 27. Tickets from \$45, discount offers for groups and those with Flex Passes. Call the box office: 508-385-3911, or visit www.capeplayhouse.com