

# Decades Rewind pays tribute to th

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO

Sight & Sound Editor

BENTON HARBOR — Peter Gatti sells nostalgia for a living.

Each night, the veteran keyboard player and cofounder of Decades Rewind steps on stage in a theatrical concert that pays tribute to the biggest hits of the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

Whether he's in the lobby or backstage after each show, the comments he hears are always the same.

"The words we hear most often from people after the show are 'I had so much fun,'" Gatti says by phone from his home in Tampa, Fla. "Or it's 'Oh, the memories you brought back.' Or, 'I was in tears.' That's the kind of feelings the music and this show brings to it. We kind of shut down the world for two hours and bring people back to possibly some better days and certainly to the best decades of American music, in our opinion."

Decades Rewind, which makes a tour stop Saturday night at Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, features a 14-piece band, complete with six vocalists, who effortlessly blend unique medleys from the most prominent decades in music from Aretha to Zeppelin.

"It's unlike anything else out there," Gatti says. "It's part concert, part musical theater rolled up into one. We start in the '80s and rewind back to the '60s. Everything we do is a medley and genre specific — like disco or funk or pop — to era specific. We have a hippie medley, a British Invasion medley. We have three huge video screens that portray American culture in these time periods throughout the show. We have over 100 costume changes and 60 songs. It's a party more than anything else. People dance, people sing."

Like any good idea, Gatti adds, this one started on a napkin in a bar. He and drummer Mark Blinkhorn were playing together in a cover band. One night, during a break between sets, Gatti started talking about his dream gig.

"I started saying, 'You know, I would love to have a band where you concentrate on the '60s, '70s and '80s with maybe some costumes and video,'" Gatti says. "Then Mark said, 'I've had that same idea for years. We can do this and we can do that.' So we started actually talking about it."



Ashley Renée, left, and Monica Cox, are two of the six vocalists in Decades Rewind.

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Decades Rewind

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$26-\$42

**Contact:** 927-8700 or [themendelcenter.com](http://themendelcenter.com)

**Artist info:** [www.decadesrewind.com](http://www.decadesrewind.com)

Gatti and Blinkhorn brought in guitarist Al Owen, who is also an engineer/producer at Gatti's Tampa-based recording studio, Studio G, and the idea began to snowball.

"We started recruiting and bringing in vocalists and other musicians," Gatti says. "We went everywhere from local talent to searching the internet to stealing some of the national acts coming through town. We knew we were going to be doing some rock. We knew we wanted to do some disco. We knew we wanted to do some funk. We knew we'd be doing some pop so we tried to recruit accordingly, and it all came together."

In addition to Gatti, Blinkhorn and Owen, the band includes guitarist Jimmy Delisi, bassist Jeff Stoddard, saxophonist Ryan Redden, trombonist Derrick Harris and trumpet player Patrick McKenzie. The vocalists are Coya Jones, Ashley Renée, Monica Cox, J.K. Miller III, Edmund J. Edmondson III and Wade Whiskey.

The original plan, however, was to have



ABOVE: Monica Cox, from left, Coya Jones, Frank J. Edmondson III and Ashley Renée perform some which makes a tour stop Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre

just four singers.

"But we had so many great vocalists, we didn't know who to get rid of, so we ended up with six because it was just that good," Gatti says. "We were just very, very lucky to get the kind of talent we have."

The hardest part, Gatti says, was con-

densing three decades of music into a two-hour stage show.

"Having three of the best decades in music is sort of a blessing and a curse," he says. "It's awesome to have all that material to choose from, but how do you limit it to 60ish songs?"



# e hits of the 1960s, '70s and '80s



Photos provided / Morgan Bernard

**funk during Decades Rewind, a theatrical concert featuring medleys of hit songs spanning 30 years, in Benton Harbor. ON THE COVER: Ashley Renée does her best Joan Jett during Decades Rewind.**

Some choices were easy. The show obviously includes songs from The Rolling Stones and The Beatles, including a memorable rendition of "Hey Jude." Other choices, however, were less obvious at first.

"Love it or hate it, we decided we couldn't forget disco," Gatti says. "It was a big part

of our culture for a couple of years. Sure enough, when we hit our disco medley and that disco ball starts spinning, the whole place blows up. It's like being in Studio 54 again."

One of the highlights from that medley is ABBA's disco anthem "Dancing Queen."



**J.K. Miller III, from left, Coya Jones and Frank J. Edmondson III perform a Motown tribute during Decades Rewind.**

The show has some Motown, as well, including The Four Tops' classic "Reach Out I'll Be There." There's classic rock tunes such as Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" and Boston's "Long Time," a personal favorite of Gatti.

"I was a '70s-'80s rocker dude, so I love playing the Boston song we do, which is 'Long Time,' including the intro part to it," he says. "Of course, I play keyboards and there's a lot of organ on that song."

If the show has a definitive highlight, it comes in one of the few songs done in its entirety.

"We wanted to cover 'Bohemian Rhapsody' because, even to this day, Queen themselves, even with Adam Lambert, don't do the song in its entirety," Gatti says. "The middle section they turn on the track and then go off stage and come back. We don't use any tracks for any song. We do it all live, and it's very difficult to cover that song with all the harmonies and instruments involved, but we wanted to have at it, and it's one of the highlights of the show."

Gatti, who is originally from Northeastern Pennsylvania, grew up playing the organ.

"I'm Italian, so my grandfather and my uncles, they all played accordion, which migrated into organ, and so I started taking

organ lessons as a kid," he says. "Like anything else you do as a kid, I loved it for a year, then I hated it. Thanks to my parents, though, I stuck with it."

In high school, he started playing in garage bands. And in the 1980s he was a member of the band Passage, who had some regional success before family and other commitments put music on hold before he decided to build Studio G. His studio and the relationship to the musicians who record there, led to Gatti playing more shows himself in Tampa-area bands and ultimately Decades Rewind.

He and Blinkhorn first brought Decades Rewind to the stage in November 2015. Since then, the production has toured all across Florida and is now on its first national tour.

"Maybe it's a mid-life crisis," Gatti says, laughing. "But here I sit, back at it again on the road three weeks at a time and loving every minute of it. It's become a passion. We just want to give everybody a little bit of something they love. We want the songs to be the songs that they knew. And people tell us that every night. They say, 'I knew every word to every song!' It's a thrill and we're having the time of our lives."

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