

# Gregory Charles a musical superhero

BY KATHRYN GREENAWAY, THE GAZETTE DECEMBER 2, 2009



Gregory Charles sings Judy Garland during his latest music revue called MusicMan at Theatre St. Denis in Montreal, Tuesday December 1, 2009.

**Photograph by:** Vincenzo D'Alto, The Gazette

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MONTREAL Gregory Charles enters into the realm of musical superhero with his revue MusicMan, playing at Théâtre St. Denis until Dec. 12.

Last night he had the full house cheering and bopping in their seats – laughing one minute and crying the next. And that was just in the first three numbers.

The muted and lovely opening moments featured a child at the piano (the very talented Isabella d'Éloïze Perron) playing and singing a sweet song, which soon swelled in stature to include the amazing seven-piece backup band and, like magic, Charles himself – slipping from the shadows to join Perron on the piano bench.

A tour de force segment followed during which Charles payed tribute to the men and women of music who helped shape his love of show business in all its musical glory from the time he was a little guy poking at the piano keys. His ability to evoke another singer's style knows no bounds.

A clever and funny monologue about his struggle as a child to find black heroes to look up to followed, melting into a groovy medley of hits made famous by the biggest black stars on the planet. Think Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Ray Charles, to name a few.

Then things got serious. We learned Charles' mother is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, her only remaining memories musical ones. As photos of her in her youth floated on the back scrim, Charles sang about memory and the power of music. And he cried.

(A big bravo to Matthieu Larivée for his superb lighting and video design throughout. Such style.)

The second half of the program was dedicated to testing Charles' seemingly endless knowledge of popular music through the ages. He set himself a challenge by selecting a couple from the audience who had been together for a considerable number of years. Last night it was good sports Dolores, from Lethbridge, Alberta, and Harry, a Montreal dentist – married for 53 years.

Charles coaxed them onstage and talked them through the important dates in their relationship, then traced their life together through music – plucking the hit songs from this year and that out of thin air and bringing his backup band along for the ride.

When deadline beckoned, Harry and Dolores were singing along to the Nat King Cole 1950's hit Mona Lisa – but not before Dolores fretted about possibly getting a parking ticket if the show didn't end right quick. Dolores, you scene stealer, you.

Gregory Charles MusicMan is at Théâtre St. Denis, 1594 St. Denis St., Dec. 4-5 and Dec. 10-12 at 8 p.m. Tickets available through Ticketpro: 514-790-1111, [www.ticketpro.ca](http://www.ticketpro.ca).

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