**National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region**

Society : HEOS Musical Theatre

Production : Footloose

Date : 13th April 2019

Venue : Questors Theatre Ealing

**Be inspi**

Report by : Mike Smith

 Show Report

Thank you for you warm welcome and the hospitality received from your Front of House Team.

I was very much looking forward to your show – I enjoyed your production of Cinderella – and was

anticipating an exciting evening.

I was not disappointed.

Footloose is a big ambitious production, full of fun, drama, romance, dance and big familiar songs.

Before I comment on any aspects of performance, I must congratulate the members of the Creative Team. **Laurie Asher, Michelle Spencer, Terry Gardner** and **Richard Fairhead.**

To take a show with a cast and ensemble of thirty eight members ( I counted – not true!! They’re in the programme!) is no mean feat. So well done **Laurie** for Directing, **Michelle** for your splendid choreography, and **Terry** and **Richard** for producing, together with your talented musicians **Sue, Berni, Sam, John, Dave** and **Ellie,** a real toe tapping musical.

As we all know, no production runs smoothly without the support of a great backup team – and it was very evident that the team in place for this show were no exception.

The set which **Laurie Asher** and **Stuart La Plain** designed was very simple, it reminded me of Jail House Rock, it was well constructed by **Rob Spencer** and very effectively lit, as was the whole production, by **Rob Lugger.**

Scene changes – all nineteen of them – were cleverly created by **Sam Jeffery**, whose props were expertly moved on and off the set by a slick team of **Unscenes** and at time members of the cast.

Sound for the show, provided by **Roger Knight**, provided the audience with a clear, pleasant experience of well -balanced voices and music – not always easy in a fast -moving show.

**Jenny Yoxall** assisted by **Kevin McCarthy** who were overseeing the production obviously did a splendid job as everything ran extremely well.

The ladies of the wardrobe department - **Fiona Mackay, Margaret Partridge** and **Sue Yoxall**, hopefully were not too stretched as I see from the programme company members provided their own costume – which I must say were all in keeping with the setting and the period.

Mentioning the programme, well done **Michelle** and the marketing team, **Gina** and **Anna**, just show how well you all multi-task. A nicely presented, informative and colourful programme with some lovely rehearsal shots, interesting bi-ogs and well -placed photographs by **Harry Cambridge** and **Rosalind White.**

The opening of the show set the scene for the evening – great energy and enthusiasm from all.

The contrasting scene in moving swiftly to the church gave us a change of pace, a much calmer and gentler feel. Those members in this scene gave us the pleasure of some delightful harmony singing.

With such a large cast I apologise now if I don’t mention you by name – although you all deserve it.

In the lead roles of Ren and Ariel, **Chris Yoxall** and **Gina Ackroyd** were astonishing. Delivering dance moves and vocals that left me exhausted just watching. They captured the mixture of emotions their characters were experiencing, while maintaining their likeability. Ren struggling to fit into a new situation, and Ariel the rebellious Ministers daughter. Both grasped the opportunity to play strong lead roles with both hands, and they succeeded.

**Andrew Murphy** as Willard Hewitt created a likeable individual, cementing an unlikely friendship, which was a strong element of the storyline. There was a feeling of strong chemistry between Willard and Ren, and his blossoming of character throughout, providing a deal of comic relief, was well done.

The pairing of **Sue Yoxall** and **Chris Gibson** as Vi Moore and the Rev Shaw Moore, was inspirational.

Great singing from both. In particular, Vi’s song “Can You Find it in Your Heart” – as she struggles to tread the line between loyal wife and caring mother, and Rev Moore’s song “ Heaven Help Me” – as he struggles to come to terms with a lost son. Their performances, both as a couple and individually, displayed such strong emotion – bringing me almost to tears.

Strong performances also from other members of the cast.

Rusty, Urleen and Wendy Jo – **Holly McIntosh, Gemma Hunt** and **Deborah Alawode** – formed a delightful trio. Three very different characters, providing some lovely harmony singing and providing great back-up for Ariel. A tremendous rendition of “Holding Out for A Hero” much enjoyed by the audience, and also much enjoyed was Rusty leading “Let’s Hear it for The Boy. Both these songs (from memory) extremely popular in their own right. Both vibrant and well executed.

**Sarah La Plain** – Ethel McCormack, gave a well measured performance as Ren’s Mother. A woman who tries desperately all the time to either please or appease everyone around her, and at the same time trying to persuade her son to keep a low profile and conform. A role that falls into the “strong but silent” category. Well played – and sung, I loved “Learning to Be Silent”.

Bad boy Chuck Cranston! **Antonio Spano** certainly bought this character to life. A powerful performance of a violent, possessive boyfriend. A well -crafted (and directed) piece of acting. A difficult role – to be hated in the role - yet admired for your acting. Well done!

I enjoyed the performances of Chuck’s side- kicks, Lyle and Travis – **Tyrone Haywood** and **David Claffey.** Together with Bickle and Garvin – **Allan Zachery** and **Melissa Chitura-Bidwell**, they added lovely touches of humour to the show, especially with Willard in “Mama Says”. **Tyrone’s** facial expressions were a joy.

Two couples who gave more than creditable performances were Lulu and Wes Warnicker -**Vanessa Plessas** and **Richard Abel,** and Eleanor and Roger Dunbar – **Anne Murphy** and **David Nolder.**Lovely supportive roles as Aunt and Uncle and strong -minded citizens of the community. **Anne** also as the straight laced, po faced Principle Clerk.

A delightful cameo appearance of Betty Blast – played by **Pam Armstrong** – a roller skating Diner Bar Manageress with a great accent. Very feisty, a little wobbly – but most entertaining.

With **Cow Girl Bobbie**, **Bobbies Band**, a local **Cop**, **Townsfolk** and a talented troupe of **Dancers**

(well done **Kelly Hardie** for keeping a watchful eye) this production of Footloose was certainly one of quality. Each and every actor gave their all. What a great cast/ensemble ending, a well -chosen compilation, a grand finale worthy of a splendid show, a real crowd pleaser.

One of the pleasures of an evening at the theatre is sitting back, suspending reality for a few hours

and enjoying the ability of the performers, musicians and their behind-the-scenes team to transport you to different places, times and situations.

Knowing all those working so hard to deliver that slice of escapism take to the stage as a hobby, rather than to earn their living, can, as your production of Footloose did, add to the pleasure.

Congratulations to the entire Company. I’m sure that your enthusiasm, music, singing and performance will encourage your audience to return and support your future shows, as I hope to.

Mike Smith – District 2 Representative, London.