

FOOTLOOSE - Exmouth Centre Stage - Pavilion - April 2012

Director / Chor : Sue Bonnett MD : Simon Carter

This show is a favourite of mine, and I knew that Centre Stage would be able to do it justice. I wasn't wrong. This show has a bit more depth to it than many recent shows aimed at either the teen market or niche markets (ie 70's or 80's shows such as Boogie Nights). It boasts a script that has rather more substance than some similar shows, probably because the premise is based on actual events in Elmore City, Oklahoma. Ren McCormack suffers an enforced move from Chicago to Bomont, where he discovers that dancing is banned within the town limits following a previous tragic accident. We find a town where teenagers are frustrated at the ban and adults are reverential towards the all powerful Reverend who instigated the ban, and who seems to have the rest of the town council in his pocket. The script does a reasonably good job of presenting this small town atmosphere (especially in the number "Somebody's Eyes" - my favourite) where everyone knows everyone else's business and where a maverick like Ren is quickly black listed as a trouble maker. The angst within the reverend's family is also well illustrated.

This production had an impressive principal line up , with everyone pulling their weight. There were no passengers in this show. Much of the work falls on the shoulders of Ren McCormack and in Perry Meadowcroft the society had the perfect leading man. Good looking, a good mover, great actor, and a great singer. However he had some strong competition, particularly from Poppy Fardell as Ariel, Fran Fardell, Martha Hall and Alice Tolson as the trio of girls Rusty, Urleen and Wendy Jo. They sang really well together. In fact the singing from all the principals was impressive, the young voices coping with the pop songs well. I was most amused by Duncan Taylor's performance as Willard Hewitt. The "adult" roles were well handled, especially by Freddy Francis as Rev Moore in a performance that carried much depth. However I also particularly liked the performances of Ruth Emerson as Ren's mother and Melissa Pawson as Vi Moore.

The show is designed to run smoothly from scene to scene without a pause, and this was achieved very well, with the help of Scenic Projects scenery which was handled well on this awkward stage. Choreography was very energetic and well thought through. The full company routines were very lively. Individual choreography was also well handled. Of course , any principals dancing has to be kept to a minimum for a large part of the show because dancing is , of course, banned !!! This was managed without dampening the spirit of the show or spoiling any visual interest.

My only, small, gripe was that presumably due to cost constraints, radio mics were not worn by everyone. As a result it was sometimes difficult to hear some of the underscored dialogue and some of the vocals. The excellent band were not too loud, some of the voices needed more radio enhancement !!

I felt that this show deserves to be nominated for the youth award.

Iain Douglas