



Society : CYGNET PLAYERS  
Production : "FOOTLOOSE"  
Date : 29 September 2012  
Venue : Putney Arts Theatre  
Report by : Stephen Macvicar

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## Report

Thank you very much for inviting me to Cygnet Player's production of "Footloose" recently at the Putney Arts Theatre. Thanks also to Helen Burgess-Bartlett for making the ticket arrangements.

### Synopsis

When Ren and his mother move from Chicago to a small farming town, Ren is prepared for the adjustment to his new high school. What he isn't prepared for are the local laws - including a ban on dancing - which are the brainchild of a local preacher bent on exercising control over the town's youths. When the Reverend's rebellious daughter sets her heart on Ren, her boyfriend tries to sabotage Ren's reputation and many of the locals are eager to believe the worst about the new kid. With its Oscar'-nominated hit score (the film soundtrack album has sold over 15 million copies world-wide) the celebrated film musical now bursts explosively onto the stage

As a result of a relatively recent successful west end run and the show becoming available to amateur societies, Footloose is being performed by societies who can cope with the demands of the show. I wouldn't consider it to be one of my favourite shows but I can appreciate the amount of work it takes to make a success of it and Cygnets did this in spades.

The set was simplicity itself but it worked beautifully. Diagonal pallets mounted on a hardboard floor eighteen inches off the ground provided the production with a blank canvas but effective entrances and exits to make the playing area extremely flexible. Smoke with atmospheric downlighting added mood to the set. The aspects I enjoyed the most in this Cygnet production included the verve and vivacity which each member put into each production numbers. The attack from the ensemble was tangible and I thought the dancing was generally excellent whether it was rock'n'roll or country. It was nice to see everyone hoofing and giving their all. I liked the style of the production and in particular the attention to detail with 1980s styles and dress sense. The scene changes by cast and crew were a masterclass on how it should. There was no fuss, everybody was well drilled and moved simultaneously with purpose, whether it be re-arranging black chairs or striking tables. There weren't many downsides for me. The band was great but sometimes wasn't quite right and I did find it difficult to hear dialogue over incidental music. Some accents did wander away from the deep south of America but it is a hard accent to maintain.

Director Matthew Eberhard's ensemble were well drilled and well directed, indeed everyone looked to me to be enjoying themselves. It is sometimes difficult to know where the Director stops and the Choreographer takes over but either way group movement, general groupings and individual characterisations from every person on stage was excellent. Vocal dexterity and harmony is very important in a production of this scale. Musical Director James Beal was in charge of a splendid five piece band and an equally talented ensemble. The general strength in depth on stage for this Cygnet Players production was of a high standard. Principals and chorus alike sang well with only the odd moment when a principal was seen to be struggling. There are some cracking numbers in Footloose

none better than 'Let's Hear it for the Boy' and 'Holding out for a Hero' – both were delivered with skill and panache. My own personal favourite was 'Somebody's Eyes' which was beautifully performed. Della Bhujoo's choreography was nothing short of excellent. It was disciplined and generally took the form of line dances and good solid traditional 'chorus as one' group routines. It looked to me like the entire ensemble individually gave their all in every single number – very well done.

Technically, the show went pretty smoothly. Kevin Woods as Lighting Designer provided an interesting and colourful plot. The Sound was in the very capable hands of Dave and Nick Gates. The costumes under Rachel Quince were impressive and suitably colourful and appropriate for the period.

There are too many named principals to comment on individually but I have written a few notes on some of lead principals (in order of appearance);

Rusty – Katy Goddard – Katy played the cookie Rusty with lots of heart and dynamism. Her voice is perfect for power ballads and the lead vocal in 'Let's Hear it for the Boy' was one of my personal favourite aspects of the show.

Urleen / Wendy Jo – Kate Soper / Becky Robertson – Kate and Becky found wonderful characterisations which brought a smile to all our faces. The trio 'Somebody's Eyes' was for me the highpoint of the night.

Ren – Adam Walker – This was a strong performance from Adam as the frustrated Ren. His intensity and enthusiasm was unrelenting as was his vocal strength. My only observation was that Adam needed to bring a bit more strength and raw physicality to the role.

Rev Shaw – This was a lovely part for Jonny to play. Jonny was a relatively youthful Rev Shaw and whilst every note was not always perfect his acting was stunning. Jonny is a performer that puts you at ease when you watch him and his final 'negotiations' with Ren brought complete silence in the theatre.

Ethel McCormack / Vi Moore – Gilly Low / Nicola Roscoe – Both ladies had smallish but pivotal roles within the story and both produced nice performances.

Ariel Moore – Frances Leak – Frances was wonderful as the Ariel. Her timing and crystal voice was much in evidence especially in 'Holding out for a Hero' and the duet with Ren.

Chuck Cranston – Rich Gladwell – This is a surprisingly small role considering he is the baddie of the piece and I somehow felt he and Ren would have a final slug-out but it never materialised. A good performance from Rich nonetheless.

Willard Hewitt – Tom Cane – Last but certainly not least, Tom found a wonderfully OTT character and held it throughout. There was much humour extracted from his awkwardness!

There were some lovely cameos amongst the ensemble and indeed some lovely voices coming through to back up your principals. Congratulations to the society and the creative team for an entertaining performance and hopefully you will have been able to balance your books accordingly.

The souvenir programme had an excellent layout and interesting content. Short biogs and especially photographs are always very welcome as it shows the relevant experience and growth of performers.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the Putney Arts Theatre and best wishes for your next production.

I look forward to seeing you again soon and if I can be of any assistance at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards

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