

**THE
ROSE
BOWL
AWARDS**
FOR AMATEUR
DRAMA & MUSIC

NAME OF COMPANY	BMYP
NAME OF PRODUCTION	Footloose
VENUE	Redgrave Theatre, Bristol
DATE	Friday 26 March 2010
ADJUDICATOR	Barbara Smith

PRESENTATION

SET including STAGE FURNITURE & PROPS

The Set was very well designed and constructed to suit the small venue, and the well conceived simplicity ensured that a maximum use of the central area could be made for the activity of the large cast. Throughout a fine use of the cyc had been made with use of colourful gobos and projections. The Pews were folding and multi-functional, and wooden effect flats at the back again multi-functional to create church, kitchen, behind gasoline station, Burger Blast, and an excellent effect for under the railway bridge – very effective and well thought through. Good stage furniture and props for the Moore kitchen and for the High School Gym, and again stage furniture and props for the Burger Blast scene. All was economical and effective creating the many changing scenes. A very well conceived Set suiting both venue and demands of the production.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Very well organised and managed set changing – all scenes swiftly changed and with little interruption to the fluidity of the production. I was impressed that the backstage team knew exactly what was required of each and all managed without fuss or indecision – well done! There was a very well organised set change effected by the Cast after ‘Mama Says’ in Act 2. Sound and Lighting cues well delivered as all was well timed and controlled lighting changes. There must have been a strong team and organised management backstage to get the large cast on and off stage so swiftly and effortlessly – I was impressed with all the many smooth exists and entrances – there was a very busy coming and going throughout the production.

LIGHTNG

The gobos and projections were excellent – church window, town clock, Moon projection and later in Act 2 a blue water effect gobo on the floor of stage. Use of Amber/white for the Rev Moore dialogue and choir singing in the first number and creating a mellow sunny atmosphere. Reds for the reprise of the 3 boys and set change after 'The Girl Gets Around' number and then to Blues for Willard and Ren dialogue input. Lively colour changes in the Burger Blast scene, and the use of Whites in the Moore Kitchen made for a good realism. Cross fades were smooth and use of spots for solo and duet was effective. The lighting design was brightly colourful and constantly changing, and although not always subtle, suited the up front, large cast, energised dance input, of this musical presentation – there must have been a large set up and number of lighting cues to input into the board.

SOUND

The sound effects were well recorded and again well cued and timed. I recall that the main effect was the train – which came over well.

COSTUME & MAKE-UP

The costume for the young people with the mini skirts and shorts for girls, the check shirts and jeans for the boys, were excellently contrasted with the longer and more sedate outfits of their parents and elders. I liked the sober outfits worn for the church scenes. The Cowboy Band looked good in their black/white mini cowgirl outfits, Burger Blast check outfits again in good 'western' style, and good glitter jackets for girls in 'Holding Out For A Hero'. Choir looked excellent. I appreciated the formal and staid hairstyle for Lulu and her very 'sensible' frocks, and also noted were the fine footwear of both girl and boys in fine western style. It was an excellent touch to add moustaches to the mature men – Rev Moore and Coach Dunbar which helped to age them, but the make-up for Coach Dunbar was far too obvious with dark 'lines'. The injury make-ups were good and looked effective. The makeup and hairstyle for the mature ladies was excellent – and I appreciated the various hairstyles of the girls – lovely styling for the dizzy Wendy-Jo. All looked colourful and in excellent style fully reflecting the small town 'western' atmosphere.

MUSIC

ORCHESTRA

Throughout a fine pace and rhythm from the Orchestra and well modulated without dominating the singing input, and the instrumental blend suited the style of the production. The first number set a fine pace and change within 'Footloose/On Any Sunday' and then with sensitive drumming and then good drum and keyboard input in "I Can't Stand Still", and again in 'I'm Free/Heaven Help Me' there was excellent drum and guitar input. Sensitive keyboard backing for Vi with 'Can You Find it in Your Heart'. There was always well controlled underscoring for Set changes. The orchestra gave a strong backing tempo for the strong dance input, and the firm hand of the Conductor

guided through the changes in musical style and rhythm – an always with a respect for the performers onstage.

SINGING

The input of Rev Moore in 'On Any Sunday' was strong and with good pitch and Ren with good phrasing, pitch and diction, and backed with fine harmony from the Choir – this was a well projected number with the Rev Moore soaring above the part singing from the Company and a lovely final note to the number. 'The Girl Gets Around' was well characterised by Ren and Ariel and with the backing of the three boys. 'I Can't Stand Still' from Ren again well characterised and breaking into a fine falsetto. 'Somebody's Eyes' was well projected with clarity by Ariel and the Girls – all finely in character and with some good harmony. 'Learning to be Silent' had a lovely lyrical quality and was well pitched by Vi Ethel and Ariel – and a lovely empathy coming from Ariel – the number was well motivated and harmonised. The input for 'Holding Out For A Hero' was projected with a super energy and vitality with an excellent male chorus – there is so much going on in this scene and with the song and characterisation, dance input, grouping, it requires fine timing, and this managed well in all aspects. 'Heaven Help Me' affords a fine contrast in atmosphere and mood, and Rev. Moore captured the frustration and anguish with well timed input and fine build up. 'I'm Free' another strong number with fine input by Ren and Rev. Moore and well backed by the Company. Act 2 and 'Still Rockin' with Cowgirls not as strongly projected as should be, and then 'Let's Hear It for The Boy' and strong well characterised singing from Rusty and well supported by the Girls. I was moved by Vi and her beautifully characterised and sensitive well pitched vocal 'Can You Find it in Your Heart?' with lovely relating to her husband. Patter piece from Ren 'Dancing is Not a Crime' was well projected, and following 'Mama Says' with good audience relating and characterisation from Willard and effective harmony ending from the Boys. I was a little disappointed with 'Almost Paradise' which was not lyrical but tended to be vocally forced, hard, and almost shouted rather than sung with empathy and sensitivity. Well characterised Reprises with a touching piece from Rev. Moore with Vi.

DIRECTION

The Direction although very focussed on the Dance and Movement input, developed some fine characterisations especially with the mature characters. There was the perennial problem of an overcrowded stage, and in endeavouring to give maximum exposure to a maximum number of young people, the overall impression was very busy and often with hectic dance routines displaying finesse in the front, and the back trying to keep up – this is a problem I am finding with most musical youth productions. The overall impression was at times too 'colourful' with the strong lighting and strong activity, but when a more sensitive scene came along the contrast was welcome and indeed these scenes were generally handled well. All the characterisations were strong and well projected and performers playing the mature characters were excellent with body language and delivery of both dialogue and song. The movement given to solo/duet

songs was very good and complemented the number, but some of the large groups numbers were a little ragged because of varying dance skills input. From an artistic/creative point of view I felt the production could have had more light and shade concentrating on the story line for greater realism, and with less repetitive large chorus dance input, but this does not take away from the superb energy and vitality that went into the entire presentation.

MOVEMENT & DANCE

CHOREOGRAPHY including DANCE SKILLS & GROUPING

The opening was full of vitality, good groupings, and variety of steps including some good lifts – and I appreciated the fine ‘freeze’ of the chorus during the Ren dialogue. The scene in the church was excellently grouped and again a finely controlled congregation all turning to the audience during ‘On Any Sunday’. A good movement routine for Ren in ‘I Can’t Stand Still’ and good individual groupings for the school coming on stage. ‘Somebody’s Eyes’ I felt was a little distracting with the hairdressers etc, spread over the acting area, and could have been more effective if characterised by the Girls and Ren in a Spot creating their own atmosphere and interpretation of life in Bomont. All the activity in Burger Blast and ‘Holding Out For A Hero’ was excellent – lovely press-ups from the Boys, and the ending with Ariel on the Bar and being bought forward by two boys, and earlier the Willard and Rusty entrance, and the roller blading staff (they did need some further skill input) – this was a fine piece and made an excellent impact. Nice fight beating up Ren by Chuck and mates, and I was giggling at the irony of Coach and his increasing ‘press-ups’. A lovely final picture grouping at the end of Act 1. Line dancing at the beginning of Act 2 was fine on a very crowded stage, and Willard learning to Waltz excellent – he was a good mover and you have to move well to move ‘badly’, and Rusty with some lovely moves and turns – good final picture. Another fine routine for Willard in ‘Mama Says’. Good grouping of the Company at the Town Hall. The Finale was well handled and with a fine final picture, and good line-up. The energy and focus of the Company was excellent throughout and above all there was enjoyment.

ACTING

CHARACTERISATION

REN – Good opening dialogue with Ethel and fine pace of delivery and relating with his Mother. Piece with Willard before ‘I Can’t Stand Still’ was again well cued and paced. Lively input in Burger Blast scene and I appreciated the sensitive input with Ariel under the bridge in Act 1. Again a fine piece with Mrs. Moore. In Act 2 another sensitive scene with Ariel, and then the fine speech about Dance at the Town Hall meeting. I liked the input with Rev. Moore with both trying to reason with each other – a fine build up of tension and then anti-climax of the reasoning by Ren – well motivated piece of acting. The young performer has fine all round skills – song, dance and acting, and the journey that Ren took in the Musical was clearly projected. A fine input.

ETHEL – A challenging role and the young performer had not quite captured the maturity of Ethel and I felt that visually the hair style was too young. Dialogue was well projected but the characterisation needed a more concerned depth and motivation to capture the essence of the Mother.

REV. MOORE – This was a fine characterisation and although a young performer there was a truly mature motivation behind this portrayal. I fully appreciated both his anguish and his stern treatment of Ariel. Again fine acting and singing skills. His dialogue was well timed and relating with Ariel, Vi and Ren was first class. An admirable performance and truthful characterisation.

VI – Another excellent and well motivated characterisation and as with Rev. Moore a fine depth of mature understanding of the role. This was a very sensitive performance and fine relating with Ariel, Ren and her Husband. The argument with Ariel and Rev. Moore before 'Heaven Help Me' was excellently timed and delivered. A finely focussed and excellently motivated performance.

ARIEL – I liked the feisty Ariel and her change of attitude from being with parents to being with friends was well projected – and indeed in the first scene with her peers she was very provocative, and then contrasting the feisty we also had some lovely sensitive relating with Ren and her parents. Fine all round acting, dance and singing skills – but beware of shouting rather than projecting with the singing. There was a lovely empathy with Vi and relating with Ren was another good journey of attraction for each other. A fine performance.

LULU – This was an excellent touch of comedy and the young performer projected a fussy busy-body character – and looked visually perfect with old fashioned clothes and hair style. The body language was excellent and gestures in keeping with the characterisation. A lovely comedy input with realism and credibility.

COACH DUNBAR – Fine crusty characterisation with a touch of sadism with the penchant for press-ups. Well projected dialogue and sturdy body language suiting the role.

ELEANOR – Nicely self righteous and supportive of the Church and the beliefs of the town against Dancing. A good support role.

RUSTY – Lovely energy and vitality to this character with fine comedy timing. A good explanation of the car crash which really is a key speech. Her relating with Willard excellent and again with good comedy timing and energy. I admired the body language and movement skills of this young performer. Excellent characterisation.

URLEEN – A fine contrast to the other two – she was dramatically romantic and relating with the girls always focussed.

WENDY JO – Dizzy and hair twisting and again with fine comedy timing. Another well focused performance and with fine relating and timing with the others in the trio.

CHUCK – Nicely aggressive and a real bully. His anger with Ariel well portrayed and the fight with Ren again managed with energy. He was firmly the leader of his gang with the faithful LYLE and TRAVIS.

LYLE and TRAVIS – I felt that there could have been some more acting direction and input with motivated contrast between these two – they did remain as side-kicks rather than individuals. Good clear projection of dialogue and focus at all times.

BETTY BLAST – A good characterisation with her busy stage presence and chewing gum as she serves the customers – I loved her exit line “give me a push honey”. A fine comedy performance.

WILLARD – He was excellent. This young performer had super movement skills alongside his acting and singing – you have to be a good mover to portray a bad one. He looked perfect with the glasses and silly cowboy hat and his gauche body language. His awkward attitude and longing to be ‘cool’ was very well projected. Excellent input in the Burger Blast scene and a fine punching the air in anger after Chuck piece with Ariel. Willard mastering the Waltz was an excellent piece of comedy routine and the entire scene was first class with timing and pace. He truly came into his own with ‘Mama Says’. The relating with Rusty was excellent and again the journey he took was well projected. A first class performance.

BICKLE/GARAVIN/JETTER – They backed Willard excellently with ‘Mama Says’ and with fine movement skills.

COWGIRL BAND – A good input and with energy and good singing and movement skills.

OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT

The overall achievement was very good and the energy of the Company was outstanding. My main concern was as previously mentioned, the overcrowded stage and the very busy presentation both of dance and lighting, which at times, did tend to take away from finesse of dialogue and characterisation. There is a strong story line to ‘Footloose’ and a true sense of drama which should be respected, and the journey taken by all main characters is clearly marked in the dialogue. I congratulate the Company on the presentation of the mature characters and also the energy, vitality, and skills of the younger Leads – all excellent. I do appreciate the dilemma of Musical Youth Companies – all want to be in it and then there is the financial viability, and the consequent is that a large chorus has to be trained up with song and dance, and along side that, the motivation to be given to the acting skills of characterisation. It would have been ideal if a smaller Company could be assembled and each member given a distinct character to project within the song and dance numbers giving scope for more stylised choreography rather than ‘en masse’ – but it is not feasible. I do congratulate the dance input which was projected with superb vitality and above all with everybody on stage enjoying – and above all learning and improving performance skills. Well done on a fine achievement.

Thank you for an enjoyable evening and for your kind hospitality and I look forward to be asking at some time in the near future to another BMYP production.