

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD
SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2011/2012
ADJUDICATION

<i>Group</i>	WOW!
<i>venue</i>	Witham Public Hall
<i>Date of Adjudication</i>	18 th February 2012
<i>Production</i>	Footloose
<i>Director</i>	Nikki Mundell-Poole
<i>Adjudicated by</i>	Jane Rayner and Anne Sexton

Front of House

This was my first visit to Witham and the very spacious hall immediately impressed me. What a bonus to have tiered seating! We were given a very warm welcome by the well-organised front of house team, shown to our seats and offered interval drinks. The programme was very well put together and printed to a high standard. I liked the cast photos arranged like an American High School yearbook, the biographies of the cast and a synopsis of the story.

Set

With many diverse scenes, the basic set of steps, platforms and metal barriers was well used. The Moore's home consisted of two units and a range of chairs with a table, all brought on and struck quickly, quietly and most efficiently by the backstage crew.

Both the church and the school used simple benches to good effect.

Costumes

There was an immediate and obvious differentiation between the clothes worn by the teenagers and the conservative adults. They captured the spirit of the 80s and were bright and colourful with a clear American influence. There was a range of styles with the adults' clothing indicating their jobs or persona.

Orchestra

This was a high quality group of seven musicians who played the mostly rock numbers well, giving pace and excitement to the action. The only slight problem was that sometimes the incidental music meant that some lines were lost. As always, a live band adds to the enjoyment of the production.

Lighting and Sound

Lighting was used to great effect to create and enhance mood and also to illuminate separate areas of the stage. Projections were used to portray stained glass windows in the church and a moon for evening scenes. There were lots of colour changes, fading, and good use of spotlights.

Sound effects were appropriate and on cue.

Ren. Jake Davis

Jake had a very good voice and played the role with sensitivity and maturity. He established a good rapport with his mother. His dancing was slick and he had great stage presence, covering the varied emotions of the character. A realistic performance, he made Ren the romantic hero we all wanted to see triumph against the blinkered prejudices of the small town.

Willard. Josh Read

Willard is an appealing country bumpkin character and Josh captured his slight diffidence and unsure manner. He possessed not only the requisite song and dance skills but also a gift for comic timing.

Rusty. Zoe Rogers

As Rusty, Zoe was gutsy and fun with a powerful, deep, rich singing voice and an enthusiastic, squeaky speaking voice, which perfectly suited her character. Great confidence and animation. Well done, Zoe.

Ariel. Matilda Bourne

Ariel needs to sing a range of songs and Matilda handled the sassy rocks numbers just as well as the slower songs. She gave us a complex character – both as the rebellious young woman who hangs out with the town's bad lad and the sweeter daddy's girl at home. Matilda handled the wide range of Ariel's emotions with maturity and confidence. When she was quiet and reflective, she gave a moving performance with depth.

Chuck. Michael Stewart

Michael brought a sense of menace to this role; his first major part and he grew in confidence throughout the show. Well done.

Principal Clarke. James Simpson

James was a serious, mature teacher who, with his imposing height and demeanour was an excellent Principal. He really stood out as an authority figure.

Wendy Jo. Martha Lawless

Initially monosyllabic, chewing her gum, Martha added some lovely harmonies to the songs.

Urleen. Rachel Goddard

Rachel had a good singing voice, was attractive and animated and worked well with Rusty and Wendy Jo.

Coach Dunbar. Michael Watling

A strong performance of this narrow minded, angry man.

Ethel. Hannah Willingale

This was an understated performance, showing many emotions with realism. She let us see how lonely and lost she felt.

Vi Moore. Bailey Whitnell

An excellent performance from Bailey, subtly conveying her dissatisfaction with life as the minister's wife. She had maturity in her acting that really made her seem like an adult among teenagers and she showed powerful emotion as she cried out the line "He was my son, too!" Well done – you brought tears to my eyes. Her emotional singing was very special.

Revd. Shaw Moore. Steve Patient

Steve gave the buttoned up Reverend a slow drawl, which made his blinkered opinions somehow more powerful, accentuating his conviction that he alone was right about all things. He conveyed great maturity and showed both anger and humility as he finally admits he may have been wrong. This was a performance with realism and conviction, coupled with a really good singing voice.

Ensemble

The ensemble was well drilled, and danced and sang with energy and enthusiasm. The opening number just exploded onto the stage in a burst of colour, movement and great singing. The dancing was always slick – a tribute both to the choreographer and the cast.

Conclusion

This was a wonderful evening's entertainment by a very talented group of young people. Those who played adults remained aloof and separate from the teenagers by clever use of stance, body language and costumes. At no point did they appear the same age as the others on stage – a difficult feat. Well done. The teenagers all had boundless energy, conveying restlessness, tinged with a stereotypical sense of rebellion.

There were some delightful harmonies in the songs.

The actors were always positioned well on stage and the set piece dance routines were excellent. Some of the roles were quite small but they all added to the whole. The different levels were very well used in a natural manner and accents were mostly consistent. It's always a tribute to the skill of the actors when after a few minutes you can forget that these are not their natural accents!

There were moments in this performance that were funny and charming, serious and moving, emotional and light-hearted.

This group has an amazing fund of talent and I don't believe a professional company could have done a better job. I had never seen the film version of Footloose and now I don't want to – I don't think it could be as enjoyable!

I wish the entire cast every success in the future.

Jane Rayner

