

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

NODA Review

This was my first visit to Witham and the public hall was a lovely, traditional venue with a stage. Everyone I met, who was a member of WOW went out of their way to be friendly, helpful and kind. From the Chair (Richard McNeill), Director (Rhianna Howard), to the Box Office Manager and Front of House Team (Donna Goddard, Debbie Rolph, plus several others). I honestly could not have asked for a friendlier welcome and your wonderful attitude, kindness and generous hospitality really made my night – thank you.

As we were shown to our seats (lovely seats at the back of the hall on the tiered area for a perfect view) there was a real buzz in the sold-out hall. This production ran for a week and most of the performances were sold out, which was terrific to hear. The WOW youth group featured a cast of over thirty talented young people who sang, danced and acted to a high standard. The audience were very engaged and clearly loved the show and all scenes, songs and dances were applauded and cheered very enthusiastically by the audience. The stage was used very well, with characters entering via the wings or coming onto the stage through the hall for more poignant moments of the production. The set was effective and emphasised an American high school. The main set involved a purpose-built unit, which revolved to show a seating area/grandstand on one side and a set of high school lockers on the other. Scene changes took place fluently and seamlessly and the unit was moved into place by the cast themselves in a very efficient manner. The sound effects and lighting were good and worked well. The music was provided by a live band, and this really helped to give this great show a sense of occasion. This show required the dialogue to be delivered at a good pace and several actors had many lines to learn. Several of the cast had mastered an authentic American accent and this added to the enjoyment of the performance. All characters could be heard at the back of the hall and the microphones worked very well indeed. The costumes and make up were particularly good and every actor looked their part. The casting of all characters was good and clearly, most of the cast were enjoying their parts. There was some exceptionally talented acting and reacting taking place and all actors interacted well and used the stage to good effect. The timing and pace were highly effective, as is needed in this fast-paced musical.

The cheerleaders were delightful, coming onto stage at various times, dancing, cheerleading, and performing some terrific gymnastic moves – well done! The ensemble in general took part with real enthusiasm. They added to the occasion of an American high school and supported the main characters well. The main characters interacted well and there was real talent evident throughout the show. Jack McConnell played the narrator/announcer Jack Scott excellently; the audience loved his appearances, and he clearly enjoyed the role. Hattie Phillips played Ms Darbus wonderfully and gave a strong performance. Rhianna Gregory played Sharpay Evans with a terrific, sassy attitude and totally made the part her own. She was ably assisted by her long suffering ‘brother,’ Ryan Evans, played by Fionn Crickett. Kieran Wingrove played the lead role of Troy Bolton very well indeed. He acted, reacted, sang and danced effortlessly and should be proud of himself. Gabriella Montez was played superbly well by Poppy Taylor. She lit up the stage whenever she appeared and again, her acting and dancing skills were wonderful. Her beautiful singing voice really added to the entire show. While watching the show, the characters were believable in their roles and huge credit needs to be given to the director for her wonderful vision with the young people she directed.

This was a particularly good youth production, and everyone involved should feel enormously proud of themselves. The lovely, well produced programme mentioned that several past members of WOW had gone on to star in the West End or now had successful careers in the entertainment business. There was definitely some terrific talent on show tonight which suggests this tradition could well continue. Once again, very well done to everyone concerned!