

# FOOTLOOSE

Michael Gray's Blog

Grease and Glee, Fame and Footloose. These are the young people's shows, celebrating joie de vivre with a string of energetic routines.

Footloose, though scarcely a masterpiece, was a canny choice for WOW, and from the opening number it was clear that they had mastered the genre. The crisp, snappy choreography, highlighting groups and individuals, and the sheer power of their movements was exhilarating to watch.

The plot – pitting the world of Mark Twain against the world of Kurt Vonnegut – is paper-thin, but it was well served by some fine dramatic performances and excellent enunciation in the lyrics.

Notably from Jake Davis as Ren, with his easy stage presence, fluent movement and pleasant voice. His final scene with Steve Patient's Pastor, where they share their sense of loss, was movingly done. But plenty of outstanding work right down the cast list: Josh Reid's dim little Willard, ably partnered by Zoe Rogers as his long-suffering girl, Matilda Bourne as Ariel, torn between her father and her friends, Michael Stewart as the bad-ass Chuck.

It was the ensembles, though, large and small, which really made this show – the hats in the air, the cowboy boots, the cheerleaders, the improvised percussion, the roller-skates – all full of inventive fun. "Mama Says", set in the junk yard, especially enjoyable, I thought.

The lighting [Nigel Northfield], the costumes and the minimalist set all played an important part, too. Like many musical film spin-offs, the show does suffer from frequent changes of scene. Efficient as they were, the pace and the energy were still too often allowed to drain away in silence.

Fortunately, the stamina of these talented young performers survives, and the protracted finale, with its party frocks, tuxes and customised calls, was just as thrilling as the opening two and a half hours before.

Footloose was directed by Nikki Mundell-Poole, with Gemma Gray; Peter Snell was the excellent MD.