

## ALL SHOOK UP

### NETG Review

#### INTRODUCTION

It's always a pleasure to adjudicate a WOW production. I have never been less than impressed with this talented young company, and "All Shook Up", offered a perfect vehicle in which to display their singing/dancing/acting skills! This is a "juke box" musical, loosely based on Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night", although I don't think most people would have realised that. The plot was used as a device around which the characters got to perform as many Elvis Presley numbers as possible. With overtones of "Grease" and "Footloose", the show most strongly reminded me of the typical Elvis movie of the 1950's and 60's, most notably the wonderful "Viva Las Vegas", in which Elvis was paired with the wonderful Ann-Margaret.

#### FRONT OF HOUSE

A very warm, friendly and efficient welcome awaited us, from the smartly, and appropriately, dressed F.O.H. team. We had perfect seats and our interval refreshments were much appreciated. Ice-creams and sweets were also on sale. There was a rather lengthy interval raffle, which was amiably conducted. It was a full house and the auditorium was full of lively anticipation from the enthusiastic audience. The programme was professionally, and attractively, designed and was an informative read.

#### SETTINGS

The set was simple but effective in making maximum use of the performance area. The scaffolding rostra, with a stairway on either side, gave height to the staging. All the pieces of set that was brought on (presumably hired), and the furniture used, had clean lines and suggested the era of the show very well. We particularly admired the realistic petrol pumps! There was an exterior backdrop curtain that masked scene changes and presented various locations. The very authentic looking Juke Box, positioned forestage left, was a great addition but not much was made of it. The suitably attired stage crew went about their tasks with smooth efficiency. Properties were excellent and also helped to create the correct period ambience for the show.

#### LIGHTING & SOUND

The lighting design was excellent, vivid colours were used to enhance the period set and costumes. Red was dominant! Cues were smoothly executed. Sound effects were also good and we were very impressed with the quality of the amplification for the performers and band. The sound balance was spot on, and we both commented that every word could be heard clearly. It was therefore a shame that Natalie's mic failed at the end of the show. All credit to her that she spoke and sang loud enough to be heard.

#### COSTUMES

Congratulations once again to the Witham wardrobe team! This was another excellent

collection of 1950's costumes; attractive full-skirted summer dresses for the girls, jeans, tee-shirts and leather (and sports) jackets for the boys. There was good attention to detail through-out the show, the convict outfits of the show's opening, set the standard for the rest of the performance. The older characters were all attired exactly to type. We loved Mayor Matilda's suit, glasses and very convincing wig; indeed all the hair styling and make-up complemented the costumes. Very well done to everyone involved.

#### MUSIC

Musically, this production was absolutely outstanding; a really great band, under the musical direction of Susannah Edom produced a superbly professional sound that got out feet tapping, and really helped to drive the pace and momentum of the show along, right from the opening number. The singing of the company, solo and ensemble, was exceptional and they produced some great harmonies. Very well done!

#### PRODUCTION/CHOREOGRAPHY

Experienced director and choreographer, Robyn Gowers, produced a fantastically entertaining, high energy show that really delivered in all aspects. There was very little to fault. The production was cleanly, and simply, staged with alot of the action presented front centre-we did feel that the stairs and rostra could have been used a little more. Entrances and exits were slick, and I loved the fact that the ensemble were always "doing" something, therefore making the background interesting without distracting from the main focus of the action. The pace of the show was terrific, it didn't flag, and the whole cast looked very confident and well-rehearsed. Robyn's choreography was attuned to the abilities of her young cast, without compromising on complexity, and there were some great numbers; the opening "Jailhouse Rock" was an initial highlight and my absolute favourite "C'mon Everybody", which really got the house rockin'!

#### PERFORMANCES

CHAD: As the central "Elvis" character, this personable and talented young performer caught the mannerisms and vocal inflections of the "King" without over-doing it and he made the part his own. Although Chad was a laid-back, cool character, Jenson Bacon also brought a boyish charm, and tongue in cheek humour to the part, that really connected to the audience. He moved, and sang impressively, and gave an impressive performance!

NATALIE/ED: Rhianna Gregory was a new face at WOW and we hope to see a lot more of her in future shows. She had a fabulous voice, and an animated, expressive face that lit up the stage. As Natalie, she was feisty and determined; and as Ed (in a disguise that, in reality, wouldn't have fooled anyone) she adopted a deepened voice and fake stubble and took the audience into the joke with her! Very well done!

JIM: At 20, Ben Rolph was the oldest member of the young company. He was well-cast as Natalie's widowed father, his characterisation bringing a touching sub-text to

the story. With his deeper, mature voice, and full beard, Ben was very convincing. His performance showed progression as Jim became more relaxed and confident when he finally ended up with Sylvia. Nicely done Ben!

SYLVIA: Playing one of the older characters, as Lorraine's bar-owning Mum, Maddie Austin was a calmly mature presence; she was very believable and her love for Jim was sincerely convincing. Maddie had a powerful singing voice, and her big solo "There's Always Me" was a vocal highlight of the production. Well done!

DENNIS: William Hackett gave a very funny, accomplished characterisation as Natalie's loveable admirer. He has great stage presence and knows how to play to an audience with good comic timing. William moved well in the show, and has a fantastic singing voice which was used to great effect through out his performance. Well done!

MISS SANDRA: As the glamorous, initially bespectacled and much-admired librarian, Liv Possee gave a stylish portrayal. She moved well in character and her performance of "Let Yourself Go" with the striking statue dancers, was a stand out number in the production. Her pairing with Dennis made for a great double act. Well done!

DEAN: Kieran Wingrove was the timid, mother-dominated geek, who learns to be more confident and assertive through meeting Lorraine. This was a quietly believable performance by Kieran, who just needed to relax a little more in his movement. Kieran and Poppy Taylor made a really likeable couple and the audience were pleased when they were finally allowed to be together.

LORRAINE: Poppy Taylor has a lovely stage presence and she clearly enjoys performing. She was very natural in the role of Lorraine, looking and sounding just right, and bringing common sense and sparkiness to her very well acted, and sung, characterisation. Well done!

MAYOR MATILDA HYDE: Hattie Phillips played another of the older characters with full-throttled enjoyment, dominating the stage and those around her. She looked the part exactly, and gave a comedy performance that belied her age. The number in which she finally "cut loose", and sang and danced with abandon brought the house down! Well done!

SHERIFF EARL: Nice work here from Luke Roberts as Matilda's henchman and silent partner. The moment when he finally stood up to her, and brought her to book, was hilarious and a real surprise! Luke's deadpan demeanour added to the fun!

ENSEMBLE: The young ensemble was terrific; singing, dancing and reacting with great energy, confidence and enthusiasm. The big production numbers featuring everyone were outstanding. Within the ensemble, Cleo Gunn, Jamie March and Fionn

Crickett offered good support playing small roles that contributed towards the community feeling of the show.

#### SUMMATION

All I can really say is WOW was wow! This was one of the most enjoyable and impressive musical productions I have seen recently. The audience really loved this fun-filled, high energy show and everyone involved should be proud of themselves!