

# FOOTLOOSE

## NODA Review

This show is built on the shifting relationships between child and adult through the teenage years. Thus we have a story line concerning a divorced mother and her son, Ren, who have moved from Chicago to the small town of Bomont, where the Reverend Moore strongly influences and carefully monitors life in a township that has approved bylaws forbidding dancing of any sort: all the result of a tragedy 5 years previously which claimed the life of his son and four other teenagers. However, whilst he has a strong depressive influence on the behaviour of youngsters in the town, his daughter Ariel, barely toes the line and his wife, Vi, struggles to keep things together. All pretty downbeat, you may think, for a Broadway, then West End, musical that subsequently has been followed by several pro tours, and more recently a film. But wait.

In a production that is by no means dour, but is in fact bursting with energy in the cause of curing depression, the new arrival Ren, played in style and with enthusiasm by Jake Davis, takes on the self imposed task of waking up the town, using dance as the driving force. Support for his endeavours grows from youngsters at his school, among whom is Ariel Moore, already torn between parents and friends, played convincingly and in good voice by Matilda Bourne. Some good singing from both and particularly their duet 'Paradise'. In addition, from an energetic cast of 37, came a number of other very good performances. Amongst these, the not very bright local hick, Willard, played by Josh Read in a gem of characterisation, underwent an often hilarious upgrade in confidence from his initially tentative, then escalating, pursuit of the talkative Rusty; played to the full by Zoe Rogers. The characterisation of Rev Shaw Moore, by Steve Patient, came across well enough as the driving force behind the no dancing rules, and the final discussion between him and Ren, to break the deadlock, was well done. A convincing portrayal of the worried Vi, in voice manner and looks came from Bailey Whitnell. Michael Stewart gave us a suitably nasty and menacing Chuck, the token bad boy of the group.

Given that the whole premise of the show rests on the banning of dance, choreography presents something of a challenge, but the opportunity in scenes well away from the visibility of Rev. Moore gave plenty of scope for some very good numbers.

Over 12 locations are listed in the programme, but the use of a basic fixed multi level background structure, plus simple additions as required and selective lighting, served admirably to convey location as the plot proceeded.. A splendid achievement on the relatively small .stage space available.

Accompaniment by the seven piece orchestra was in keeping with the style of the show, was a spur to those on stage, and was at times exhilarating. However, on too many occasions its level obliterated what the on stage voices were trying to get across. Not perhaps vitally important in chorus numbers, but frankly a disaster against a soloist singing a lyric that is often both telling story and expressing feelings. Is there no way of linking the stage sound to that of the orchestra and so putting balance under the control of one person?

This was in so many ways a great evenings entertainment and I do congratulate all of those involved in its production..

