

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

Theatre Life Review

Coming to see and review shows for WOW is always a pleasure, as they never fail to deliver great shows for the local audience. High School Musical was no exception, being the right choice for half term. The auditorium was packed with excited young people and families enjoying a fun night out.

Right from the opening number 'Wildcat Cheer', the whole cast burst onto the stage with huge confidence and energy, in their brightly coloured costumes, the joy of being on stage after a long rehearsal period radiated from all their faces as they took us through the story.

So similar to the Musical Grease, we meet Troy the heartthrob team captain and brainy Gabriella who have met on holiday and end up at the same school and fall in love. These two characters were played by Kieran Wingrove, and Poppy Taylor. Both of these young performers were excellent in their characterisation and showed that they could perform with confidence. Poppy has a really beautiful voice and had a smile that lights up the stage every time she is on and Kieran's singing whilst dancing and using a basketball, showed he was totally at ease on stage. I loved their duet 'I can't take my eyes off of you'

The other lead couple were Rhianna Gregory as Sharpay Evans and Fionn Crickett as her brother Ryan. Rhianna played the diva 'it' girl, with attitude, to perfection and boy can she sing and dance. With her brother in tow she will do anything to sabotage the romance between Troy and Gabriella but also to get the lead role as Juliet in the school play. Both commanded the stage and gave convincing performances. I loved their Salsa number "What I've been looking for".

A standout performance by Hattie Phillips, as Ms Darbus, the drama teacher, with her acting skills and beautiful clear projection she embodied the role, clearly living and breathing her life in the theatre. She clashed frequently with Coach Bolton (Jamie Marsh), the driven basketball coach, who gave good support although sometimes losing his American accent.

There was great support by the other principals including Jack Scott (Jack McConnell) Zeke Baylor (Lewis Andrews), Chad Danforth (James Green) and Taylor McKessie (Madison Austin) although the dialogue was rushed in places and could have been slower and therefore clearer. Kelsi Nielsen – Cleo Gunn gave a good performance as a shy but talented pianist who really did look like she was playing the keyboard. There are too many people to mention everyone but all the other ensemble members whether basketball players or cheer leaders were totally engaged in their performances. Sometimes during songs there were a few off key moments but this did not detract from their belief in the characters.

The set was excellent using just stairs in the centre of the stage which when revolved became lockers and notice boards and then later a basketball court. Space was left for the large cast so no one seemed to be boxed in at any time. The background of a brick wall with red banners and a centre banner of a red wild cat added to it all.

Costumes were great and the final scene when they were all in red and white gave the show a wow factor. The Megamix at the end was super and got the audience clapping along. Certainly the cast were really having a great time and demonstrated huge enthusiasm, belief and talent.

Lighting was fine although sometimes I noticed one or two in the dark and the music from Musical Director Phil Toms and his orchestra was as usual, excellent, never drowning out the young performers.

Choreography by Shelley Fenn was good and she had obviously worked hard to achieve the standards we saw on stage. Director Rhianna Howard was proud of her cast and you could see just how much work had been achieved with these very youthful performers.

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