

Grease – Reviews

Kev Castle

"Grease" by Carlton Operatic Society.

Nottingham Theatre Royal.

I could have written this review without seeing it because of the calibre of people involved and the history of the Carlton Operatic Society, but then I wouldn't have had the utter pleasure of the good gushing that is following.

Imagine a good basic burger that you've enjoyed for years and then add a slice of mature cheese, bacon, relish and side salad. How scrummy and enjoyable is that? Well that's the analogy for tonight's performance.

I love "Grease" because it's such a fun, fluffy musical that everyone knows; great songs and a happy ending with loads of great comedy lines. In the directorial hands of Amanda Hall and her incredibly talented cast and crew, this musical has been escalated to another level of fun and enjoyment.

I know not if I've missed some of the lines in other productions, maybe due to sound issues or whatever, but there seemed to be lines here that I hadn't noticed before. Comedy lines I couldn't remember which now brought a new sense of fun to the show. But then again this is the stage version and not solely based on the film version.

A massive cast with a mix of debut performances and established board-treaders who merged so well that you wouldn't be able to tell the newbies from the rest; so professionally good was this cast. This shows what a brilliant relationship this group have away from the stage for it to spill over into the on stage performance and inter character relationships, making the whole cast 100% believable.

There are so many people to mention who brought this show to fruition. Let's start with the amazing cast.

Mark C-Bainbridge as Danny Zuko, almost unrecognisable without his facial hair and with the "D.A." hair style. Another faultless performance for Mark and I was so happy that, in his solo numbers, he didn't go over the top, and his rendition, especially of "Sandy", was just like the soundtrack. Completely controlled, as was all of his vocals, and he played Zuko as a lovable college jock.

Catherine Cunningham (Sandy), again spot on with her version of the naive pussycat who was transformed into the sexy tiger. Catherine's "Hopelessly Devoted" was a full production with backing vocals and a much fuller orchestral sound, and the sound I'll get on to later. Another classy vocal performer.

The T Birds, Patrick McChrystal (Doody), Liam Hall (Roger), Sam Hutchinson (Kenicke) and Paice Lees (Sonny) formed a wonderful supporting cast and, as only to be expected, provided some great backing vocals, and nice to hear Liam with a solo singing part.

Loved the almost dreamlike sequence section with Doody singing "Those Magic Changes" with the backing singers and the glittery back drop and lighting plus the look on Sonny's face of disbelief at the glittery scene change is something to watch for.

Mirroring the T Birds are the equally good Pink Ladies, Judie Matthews (Rizzo), Sarah Millington (Frenchy), Aston Fisher (Jan) and Abby Wells (Marty). A brilliant support but I must mention Judie's "There Are Worse Things I Could Do". This is one of my favourite songs from the musical and the passion behind her voice just sent the shivers up my back and neck. Just gorgeous.

I always look forward to seeing "Teen Angel" and over the years this role has varied and has been changed somewhat vocally. Matt Wesson has now topped the previous roles I've seen, all of which I have enjoyed but Matt took this role through the roof. His voice is amazing; it's soulful, bluesy and ending up with a gospel feel with audience participation call and response, he just blew me away. I think his ambition to appear in the West End singing in "Les Miserables" is not an impossible one after this performance, hopefully though not before he has put in more performances in Nottingham.

Ross Lowe (Vince Fontaine) got this role just right as the egotistical local celebrity DJ (I've made notes for my own personal use, Ross).

Putting a smile on everyone's face was James Murray as Eugene, the wimpy kid. James has perfected this character type with previous roles as Evan in "13" and Seymour in "Little Shop Of Horrors". A wonderful character role for a talented actor.

The other main cast members are Michelle Smith (Miss Lynch), Amy Rogers-Gee (Patty), Zoe Scott-Smith (Blanche), Helen Tunnicliff (Mrs Murdoch), Adam Collishaw (Coach Calhoun), Graham Ward (Johnny Casino) and Sophie Petruccio (Cha Cha DiGregorio), again a perfect supporting cast. A massive cast who created wonderful ensemble pieces, filling out the stage beautifully.

There are some lovely new arrangements of the classic "Grease" songs, under the musical direction of Christopher Rees and musical arranger Jon Orton. You will love the new rockier arrangement of "Greased Lightning" and the a capella start of the show, as well as some of the other songs from the soundtrack which have been given a fresh lease of life. Especially the live megamix at the end of the show.

Wonderful crisp sound by Rob Kettridge meant that every word was heard clearly.

Great choreography from Rachael Rees and Jessica Royce, which every member on stage made look as if you could do at home, but I know isn't as easy as it looks and a lot of blood, sweat and maybe tears have gone into this area of the show,

A multi-tiered set, designed by Amanda Hall and Tom Mowat allowed the show to spread out naturally, making the large cast not look cramped or crowded. Tom was also responsible for the brilliant lighting design, adding another level of professionalism to the performance. Although the audience may not appreciate the work that goes in to the lighting, I must mention Simon Carter and Peter Hodgkinson for their "spot on" work with the follow spots. It's only noticed when the spots aren't as sharp as they should be, and the spot follows behind the actor instead of on the actor.

These little things all go to enhance the performance for the audience member. Things like the continuity of music while the scenes are changed on stage, distracting the audience from what is happening between the main scenes.

You know I could go on and on just telling you how much I loved this performance but the best thing to do is go and see this show yourself. Even if you've seen it a hundred times before, go and see this performance because I guarantee that you'll see it with new eyes and ears.

"Grease" is on at the Nottingham Theatre Royal until Sunday 5 June 2016.

[Theatre Online](#)

Pre-Show

Good evening and welcome once again to the Theatre Royal in Nottingham. Tonight I am here to watch tonight's Performance of Grease, the latest production from The Carlton Operatic Society. Last time we were here it was to see their excellent production of Legally Blonde.

Grease is a high octane, fun musical loved by many and containing a number of well known songs. It is set in 1959 at fictional Rydell High School and follows ten working-class teenagers as they navigate the complexities of peer pressure, politics, personal core values, and love. The score attempts to recreate the sounds of early rock and roll. Although it is a fun show it also mentions some more serious topics such as teenage pregnancy, peer pressure and gang violence; its themes include love, friendship, teenage rebellion, sexual exploration during adolescence, and, to some extent, class consciousness/class conflict.

That said it has many foot tapping tunes and big dance numbers that may well have the audience clapping and maybe dancing in the aisles. Well known songs include:

"Summer Nights" : "Freddy, My Love" : "Greased Lightnin'" : "Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee" : "We Go Together"

I last saw a very good production of the show earlier this year at Trent College from The Long Eaton Operatic Society. Looking forward to seeing another great show from this award winning society tonight so had better take my seat in the auditorium. More from me later.

Interval Report

Interval time at the Royal and after a very exciting first act I need a drink! So far all has gone very well indeed with strong performances all round. Sound and lighting is fabulous and there is a fresh feel to the production - hard to describe but it is certainly there.

Really enjoying this production with lots of songs we know and many more we think we do. Very energetic dancing from the ensemble and everyone is obviously enjoying themselves on the stage as we are in the audience.

The costumes, lighting and sound is very good.

Really looking forward to Act 2, after my drink! Diet Cola, of course!

Post Show

The show has just ended and what a show it was. Exceptional, dynamic and exciting performances, a great orchestra, an attractive and well used set and brilliant choreography. Lighting and sound were great - could hear every word both sung and spoken.

The audience loved it and gave the cast a prolonged ovation at the end.

The Finale was quite simply breathtaking - one of the best I have seen. You can't beat a good finale and I have to say I am often disappointed by some local productions in this regard. This was however, faultless. Gave us all the chance to join in with the songs and to clap for all we were worth. Worth coming to see the show just for that. The rest was, of course, fantastic as well.

Come and see this show - you will love it!! The audience obviously left the theatre in a high state of pleasure and that is what going to the theatre is about isn't it? Enjoying yourself. I love to listen to the buzz of conversation when leaving the theatre and to pick up some words. Tonight the words were "brilliant." "really good," "great singing" and from one younger person, "can we come again?"

Well done to Amanda Hall, the Director and her talented production team for producing this show of great quality.

Scene changes, incidentally were very smooth. Well done to the stage crew.

There will be my Theatre Online Summary later this evening and a fuller review as soon as possible.

So it's goodnight from the Theatre Royal in Nottingham.

(David)

Summary Review

Title: Grease - Carlton Operatic Society

Date: June 1st 2016

Singing Overall: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Choreography: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Band: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Set: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Lighting: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Sound: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Individual Performances: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Ensemble Performance: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Production/ Staging: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Costumes: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Entertainment Value: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Theatre Online Recommendation: Go and see it - fabulous show with a brilliant Finale. I just loved it!

(David - Theatre On Line)

Full Review

(to follow)

Downstage Centre

Grease - ☆☆☆☆

The musical *Grease* needs little introduction owing to its iconic status amongst the stage and screen musicals of the last 40 years.

Since its first outing in 1971 followed by its Broadway premiere the following year it has proved to be an enduringly popular musical, taking the title of the longest running Broadway musical by the time the original Broadway run ended in 1980. More recently the show sparked reality TV star searches in both the USA and UK to find new stars to play the roles of Danny and Sandy showing that the obsession for this classic tale of teenage romance, adolescent drama and rock and roll is universally enduring to countless new generations of musical fans. Add to this the iconic film adaptation in 1978 starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John and this musical could prove a very daunting task for a company to tackle, striving for a fresh outlook and originality while trying not to lose any of the original charm, however Carlton Operatic Society have proved once again that they are certainly up to this task.

Thought and Detail

Even before the curtain rises on this show, the mood is already nicely set by the radio DJ Vince Fontaine playing songs of the era to the audience throughout the theatre (even in the toilets) interspersed with his banter which features some nice little references if you get chance to listen (Calvin Klein from 'Hill Valley' ringing any bells with any *Back to The Future* fans out there??) Some nice thought and detail that go in to such extras really add to the whole experience of the evening. Add to this a 'turn off mobile phones' announcement from Rydell High's own principle Miss Lynch and also the excellent programme designed in the style of a 1959 school year book, complete with teenage photos of the company, and the audience are beautifully primed and ready to be immersed into the world of fast cars, hair gel, first cigarettes, raging hormones, cheerleaders and leather jackets that is *Grease*.

We meet our two main groups of supporting characters the T-Birds and the Pink Ladies during the opening sequence with 'Grease Is The Word' in which they sing about their rebellious angst riddled teenage lives. Next enter the central characters of Danny and Sandy who following a holiday romance now unexpectedly find themselves attending the same school. The warm fuzzy feelings are all still there but now they have other issues such as Danny trying to maintain his 'cool guy' image with his peers the T-Birds and Sandy trying to find acceptance amongst a new group of would be friends in the Pink Ladies. Unfortunately this does not help the course of true love to run smoothly.

The iconic roles of Danny and Sandy were both well played by Mark Coffey-Bainbridge and Catherine Cunningham respectively. They particularly shone in their individual numbers with Mark singing the number 'Sandy' with ease and swagger and Catherine giving an especially touching performance of the lovesick favourite 'Hopelessly Devoted'.

Iconic

With bravado a-plenty and hormones a-jangling the T-Birds made a nice male ensemble with some very strong vocals in the individual numbers such as 'Mooning' executed with pleasing comedy by Liam Hall as Roger and 'Those Magic Changes' performed impressively by Patrick McChrystal as Doody and of course the iconic number 'Greased Lightning' performed with great energy and attack by Sam Hutchinson as Kenickie and the T-Birds together with members of the ensemble. Mention must also go to Paice Lees who played Sonny with great bravado while also managing to pull out some of the real subtleties of the role.

Equally, the self-assured queens of Rydell High, the Pink Ladies, had moments to shine in individual numbers as well. Beautiful vocals were demonstrated by Abby Wells in the number 'Freddy My Love' and Aston Fisher brought out some lovely comic moments in her portrayal of food-loving Jan making an endearing pairing with Roger in the number 'Mooning'. Sarah Millington played the lovable and ditty

Frenchy with real class and humour giving some great reactions in the 'Beauty School Dropout' number. A real stand out performance however was given by Judie Matthews as Rizzo with both her numbers 'Look At Me, I'm Sandra Dee' and 'There Are Worse Things I Could Do' being real highlights of Act 1 and 2 respectively. No less impressive was her portrayal of the character of Rizzo throughout the show which was utterly convincing and consistent. An extra nod to both her and Sam as Kenickie, for giving a stomach churningly accurate reminder of the horror that is teenagers 'making-out' in public, which they attacked with real gusto on the picnic table during the 'Mooning' number (brilliant and funny but equally... yuck!!)

Slick Performance

In addition to the main groups, there were also some nice supporting roles such as Patty Simcox with her irrepressible yet unrequited affections for Danny played by Amy Rogers-Gee and the loveable geek Eugene who seems forever oblivious of his status as an object of ridicule by the T-Birds, played adorably by James Murray. The school Principle Miss Lynch was played with suitable bluster and authority by Michelle Smith, while Matt Wesson gave a really charismatic and vocally proficient performance as the Teen Angel – a real crowd pleaser and rightly so. Graham Ward gave a slick performance as Johnny Casino and Ross Lowe shone through with some great comedy and smoother than smooth one-liners as Vince Fontaine, taking the high school dance scenes to another level.

Immediately impressive from the outset in this show was the music from both the cast and the orchestra under the direction of Chris Rees. The opening harmonies of the cast in 'We Go Together' were very well controlled and executed and the company continued to impress throughout, right through to the rather remarkable finale 'mash-up' of songs which was handled with great dexterity by orchestra and cast alike.

Credit must go to Director Amanda Hall and Choreographer Rachel Rees, and their assistant Jessica Royce for some excellent staging and manouvering of the company throughout the show.

Born to Hand Jive

The well-executed choreography was enhanced by some nice use of the different levels that were made possible by the simple yet effective stage design, particularly in the number 'Summer Nights' which was a real delight to watch. There were some nice shifts in pacing which helped to keep the show bouncing along nicely and in particular the handling of the transition from the frenetic 'Born to Hand Jive' number in Act 2 into the beautiful stillness of 'Hopelessly Devoted' was very effective bringing even more poignancy to this number. The lighting was used particularly well in this number and equally so in 'Greased Lightning'. The impressive lighting available at the theatre was certainly used to good effect throughout the show.

Mention must also go to some slick stage management led by Vicky Johnson and supported ably by the stage crew and properties team. The staging appeared deceptively simple and fresh however there was plenty of work between the scenes including the tricky manouvering of the infamous car 'Greased Lightning'.

Overall this was a thoroughly enjoyable evening of entertainment that is certain to impress the legions of *Grease* fans out there as well as delight audiences who are new to this show. The obvious enjoyment of the performers on stage was infectious, leaving the audience grinning from ear to ear as they left the theatre.

Following their move from the Nottingham Playhouse in 2014 Carlton Operatic Society now appear well established and thoroughly at home on the splendid stage of the Nottingham Theatre Royal and their next production here of *West Side Story* in 2017 will be eagerly anticipated.

East Midlands Theatre Review

Phil Lowe

The latest musical theatre production by Nottingham's Carlton Operatic is *Grease* – the musical, directed by Amanda Hall and choreographed by Rachael Rees with Jessica Royce as assistant director and assistant choreographer. Chris Rees is musical director for the live ten piece band. Musical arrangements for the show come courtesy of Jon Orton.

Grease – the musical is a lively fun story set in the 1950s in the USA and enjoys a host of upbeat and romantic songs like Grease Is The Word, Summer Nights, Greased Lightning, Look At Me I'm Sandra Dee, Shakin' At The High School Hop, Sandy and You're The One That I Want. Most of the audience members will be familiar with these from the popular film version. Audience members that go along to experience something new will have a fun time with the fictional Rydell High School gang clapping along to the songs and enjoy the generally high production values alongside enthusiastic and talented performances from the young cast.

The singing in Carlton Operatic's show is of a high standard throughout and there is a consistent level of feeling for the period through the acting and excellent costumes. The action is often written tongue in cheek and the scripting can be a bit corny and implausible if you take it too seriously. Would these generally nice young guys really go out with baseball bats and iron pipes to beat up a rival gang? Does sweet demure Sandy really need to suddenly become a vampish femme fatale to attract her man Danny Zuko? In a less candy coated musical perhaps she would consider feminism as a stronger weapon. This however is a fluffy feel good musical not a show full of deep political meaning and this is why it remains a popular choice for musical theatre lovers. You can leave your deeper thinking brain at the cloakroom and enjoy the frivolity and fun of the performers clearly having as good a time as you. Grease has some very funny moments and the comedy here is handled well.

The second half of the show certainly picks up the pace and energy from the first half. This is a good thing as the first night performance of Grease at Nottingham's Theatre Royal struggles intermittently, in first half, through some minor lack of focus in the big choreographic numbers and the acting had the feel of a very good dress rehearsal. No doubt the overall performance energy of the Grease company will develop this week and go on to prove to their audiences why Carlton have the award winning reputation that they have developed and proudly maintained since their beginnings in 1921. It is also good to see this young cast perform on stage as they are the present and future stars of this amateur company.

From a huge talented cast there are some stand out performances: James Murray in his comical role as Eugene Florczyk; Judie Matthews – very believable as Betty Rizzo; Sam Hutchinson – the right side of 1950s young male bravura; Matt Wesson- vocally impressive as Teen Angel; Mark Coffey -Bainbridge spot on as Danny Zuko; Catherine Cunningham – engaging and vocally good as Sandy.

Michelle Smith nails the strict teacher Miss Lynch with just the right amount of hidden vulnerability coupled with academic severity and Ross Lowe as sleazy DJ Vince Fontaine steals the show with his moments of “Sincerely Folks” ‘insincerity’.

Amanda Hall and her creative teams have clearly worked exceptionally hard to produce what ultimately proves to be a very credible and overall enjoyable show. If you are looking for a fun, bright and breezy musical and a 50s nostalgia fest go see Carlton Operatic's Grease.

[Nottingham Post](#)

As the curtain rises, its 1959 in America and Rydell High School's new term has started. Enter into the world of cheerleaders, leather jackets, slicked back hair and teenage romance.

Mark Coffey-Bainbridge as Danny Zuko looked the part joined by Catherine Cunningham as Sandy, and we watch them fall in love all over again.

The too cool for school gang, the T-Birds and the sassy Pink Ladies have non stop energy and provide endless entertainment. Each T-Bird and Pink Lady shines with their distinguishable character traits. The scene with Doody's guitar efforts and then that of Roger divulging to Jan his 'mooning' hobby provide extra amusement.

It is the original High School musical featuring all the unforgettable numbers like Summer Nights, You're the one that I want, Sandy and my favourite We go Together... as shoo-bop sha wadda wadda yippity boom de boom .

Greased Lightnin' saw the quiffed guys hurling themselves all over the bonnet of a custom-converted car. Another highlight was the dream sequence Beauty School Dropout in the Burger Palace. Frenchy's Guardian Angel and his band of silver permed angels are spectacular and they also elicit the audience's participation.

The set and costumes are bright and bold, and plenty of enthusiasm fills the stage. There was great orchestral accompaniment to tight vocal performances from all the characters. The dance routines particularly those with all the cast were entertaining with lots of comic touches for added laughs.

From the sleepover scene to the hand jive contest to the leather-clad finale, Grease makes you want to be. You could just hand-jive the night away.

In all, it was a slick, well choreographed sing-along classic which had audience members of all ages bopping along. Grease will always remain timelessly addictive so go and get your fix!

Left Lion

There are few musicals quite as iconic as Grease. It was with massive excitement that I anticipated harking back to the days of singing into a hairbrush with sleepover mates, until finally it was time to see it re-enacted down Theatre Royal.

The script was delivered almost word for word, with great enthusiasm from the cast, plus the Rydell High School set endlessly layering the stage, providing doses of film nostalgia. They even brought out a big wooden car for Greased Lightning, with all the crotch thrusts and fist pumps you could possibly want for in an evening.

There were some great singing voices throughout, as well as slick movements from scene to scene, although some of the choreography could have been more interesting – difficult with such a massive cast. That being said, we did get some cheerleading cartwheels. The music was seamless and powerful in all the right places, pushing through all the right emotions of everything from the opening tracks like Summer Nights, right through to the funny bounce found in Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee.

Special mentions must be made for Judie. She played the sarcastic, sultry role of Rizzo down to a T and made for an interesting watch.

Overall, the audience really seemed to enjoy the show, which was shamelessly cheesy and fun – exactly what it says on the tin.

Grease runs at the Theatre Royal until Sunday 5 June 2016

Theatre Online – full review

Review of Grease – The Carlton Operatic Society

June 1st 2016 – Theatre Royal Nottingham

Grease was certainly the word last night at the Theatre Royal, as this award winning society scored another triumph with a dynamic, energetic and stunning performance of this feel good show. The show ended with a brilliant finale and sustained applause from an enthralled audience.

Grease is a high octane, fun musical loved by many: it's set in 1959 at fictional Rydell High School and follows ten working-class teenagers, as they navigate the complexities of peer pressure, politics, personal core values and love. The score attempts to recreate the sounds of early rock and roll. Although it is a fun show, it also mentions some more serious topics, such as teenage pregnancy, peer pressure and gang violence; its themes include love, friendship, teenage rebellion, sexual exploration during adolescence, and, to some extent, class consciousness/class conflict.

It has many foot tapping tunes and big dance numbers that lighten the spirit and lift the mood. Well known songs include: "Summer Nights", "Freddy, My Love", "Greased Lightnin'", "Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee" and "We Go Together." The talent and skill of the performers meant that all of these numbers were beautifully executed; in fact this whole production was rivetingly good and would be worthy of the professional stage.

There were very strong and engaging principal performances from Mark Coffey-Bainbridge as Danny, Catherine Cunningham as Sandy, Judie Matthews as Betty, Sarah Millington as Frenchy, Abby Wells as Marty, and Aston Fisher as Jan. They were very well supported by Sam Hutchinson as Kenickie, Patrick McChrystal as Doody, Liam Hall as Roger, Paice Lees as Sonny, Amy Rogers-Gee as Patty, Sophie Petruccio as Cha-Cha DiGregorio, James Murray as Eugene, Ross Lowe as Vince Fontaine, Graham Ward as Johnny Casino, Matt Wesson as Teen Angel, Michelle Smith as Miss Lynch and Zoe Scott-Smith as Blanche.

The excellent ensemble (some cameo performances as well) delighted us with the high quality song and dance routines. They were, Adam Collishaw, Helen Tunnickliff, Rosie Carter, Gareth Morris, Laura Thurman, Alison Stones, Hannah Rogers-Gee, Bethany Wear, Celine McKeown, Katherine McNamara, Sarah Hill, Tia Elvidge, Ellie Monterosso, Lucy Bailey, Laurence Grandy, Emily Newsome, Bekki Wilson, Maya Thompson, Eva Sheppard, Alice Wright, Olivia Jones, Charleigh Hurst, David Hurt.

Well done to Amanda Hall, the Director and her talented production team, Jessica Royce (the Assistant Director and Assistant Choreography), Rachael Rees (the choreographer), Chris Rees (the Musical Director) - for producing a show of great quality and with a freshness that made this interpretation their very own. The band was superb and accompanied the cast sympathetically.

The simple but effective tiered set designed by Amanda Hall and Tom Mowat was just right for the needs of the production. The lighting plot by Tom Mowat and the sound controlled by Rob Kettridge was excellent. Scene changes were very smooth under the direction of the Stage Manager, Vicky Johnson and her large and obviously well drilled stage crew. The costume designs by Alison Stones were most evocative of the period and were complemented by appropriate hairstyles and well chosen contemporary props.

The show ended with a breathtaking finale - one of the best I have seen for a very long time. You can't beat a good finale and this one gave us all the chance to join in with the songs again and to clap for all we were worth, to give the cast all the credit they deserved. It was fully choreographed and performed with remarkably high energy and enthusiasm. It was worth coming to see the show just for that.

Go and see this show - you will love it!! Tonight's audience left the theatre with lots of smiles and that is what going to the theatre is about isn't it? Enjoying yourself. I love to listen to the buzz of conversation when leaving the theatre and to pick up some words. Tonight the words were "brilliant." "really good," "great singing" and from one younger person, "can we come again?."

Grease continues at the Theatre Royal until Sunday.

Sardines Magazine

John Anthony

Grease was the word back in 1971 when the Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs musical first hit the stage and of course went on to be the iconic film of the same name in 1978 starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John. So in the splendid surroundings of the Theatre Royal Nottingham with the vastly experienced and "multi-award-winning" Carlton Operatic Society presenting one of the most loved feel good musicals of all time, what could possibly go wrong? Well, very little as it happens.

The leading roles were in the assured hands of Mark Coffey-Bainbridge (Danny Zuko) and Catherine Cunningham (Sandy Dumbrowski). They were picture perfect for their parts and both sang beautifully and moved well. They were biologically and physically well matched even if I might have hoped for a little more chemistry.

The overall quality of the production was very good but there were several moments when some of the supporting cast took the performance to another level. The rendition by Matt Wesson (Teen Angel) of *Beauty School Dropout* was superb and probably garnered the greatest ovation from the audience. Personally I felt that Judie Matthews (Betty Rizzo) solo numbers *Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee* and *There Are Worse Things I Could Do* were the acmes of the evening's entertainment.

And yet there was so much more to admire, the chorus singing, the dance routines and the lighting were all admirable. Perhaps most notable however were the number of superb cameo performances delivered by cast members James Murray (Eugene Florczyk) and Michelle Smith (Miss Lynch) come to mind who both showed great characterisation and stage presence.

The choreography appeared to be a mixture of routines from the film and some very complex original dance numbers created for the production by the choreographer and delivered enthusiastically by the cast.

So was there no blot on the copybook? Well yes sadly. The scene changes were cumbersome with the cast and crew struggling to get the car, Greased Lightning, on and off the stage every time it made an appearance. Seeing members of the crew struggling to find the wheel locks on the 'trucks' and then hiding under the staging waiting for the end of the scene was, for want of a harsher word, poor. Given so much of the evening was known to the audience at the outset, the characters, the storyline, the songs etc. then scene changes are an opportunity for some originality and humour. The fault lies of course with the director, who did an otherwise excellent job.

The storyline, boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl back is arguably the oldest and most clichéd in all literature. The fact that it still works was evidenced by the well-deserved ovation by the packed audience with many around me on their feet and to put it in the modern idiom 'giving it large'. Back in 1971 Grease was the word and it is reassuring to note that here in 2016, some forty-five years later, it is apparently still the case that, GREASE IS THE WORD!

Grease, The Musical runs at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham from June 1st to 5th.

Audience comments

"Had a fab time guys u all did so well xxxxx good luck for the rest or the week"

"tonight's show was amazing!! I really want to see it again well done!!"

"Absolutely fantastic show tonight. Flawless. Funny, unique, professional. Well done to all involved. Eugene you played your part brilliantly."

"Teen Angel SMASHED it xxx Very well done to all"

"Well done to all the cast and crew in Grease. Sound of your voices was amazing, as always. Both Jenny Scott and I were dancing along with you. Miss you xxxx"

"Absolutely brilliant show tonight! Cast were amazing - excellent voices and performances ... Guardian Angel man - you were my favourite!"

"Awesome show last night! Me and Jo Porter loved it! Well done to all involved and enjoy the rest of the run x"

"fab and brilliant show"

"Fantastic photos and performance x"

"Was there tonight guys. Amazing amazing amazing show. Well done"

"Fantastic performance this afternoon"

"Hi Bobbie - thank you for the call. I enjoyed the opening, matinee performance of Grease. No, that's not right . . . I **loved** it! What was it that made this performance so memorable? I tried to figure it out and pondered, was it the SONGS . . . rendered beautifully and delivered with such panache? Or, was it the CASTING . . . each actor seemingly, "made for that particular role?" Or, could it be the DIRECTION . . . seamless storytelling as it should be? Or was it, simply, the wonderful CAST . . . every member so obviously enjoying performing? Of course, all these elements are crucial to the overall success but, for me, what gave this production an exceptional dynamic was . . . the CHOREOGRAPHY; it was truly inspired and inspirational. (And yes, ensuring that everyone not only knew their steps but remembered to SMILE as well . . . paid dividends). "Congratulations, "Well Done" and "Encore!" to **everybody** involved. Thank you, C.O.S. for a wonderful production. I look forward to, "West Side Story" next year. Roy Roper"

“Well, what can I say about tonight... except that COS's production of Grease was absolutely OUTSTANDING! I'm so proud of everyone who performed which showed as all of the audience got up from their seats and joined in with the singing and dancing (including myself aha!) Massive praise to all of the casts and technical crew and (plugging) there's still ONE more show for tomorrow: highly recommend this production and again, well done!!!!”

“Had a fabulous time this afternoon Aston, really enjoyed the show. Amazing talent on that stage. Well done all”

“Just watched Carlton Operatic's production of Grease at the Theatre Royal. I've got quite used to reviews being "generous" of late, but from what I saw, even the most glowing didn't do this justice. Absolutely stellar on all fronts. Congratulations to all involved.”

“Amazing show... can't stop grinning”

“Would well recommend this show..... Its Amazing!!!!”

“Wowiee! What an Amazing show!!! Absolutely blown away xxxxx enjoy the last couple of shows. Big hugs”

“What a fantastic show, you should all be immensely proud! Xx”

“one of the best musicals we have ever seen, fantastic! X”

NODA

Company:	Carlton Operatic Society
Production:	Grease the Musical
Director:	Amanda Hall
Musical Director:	Chris Rees
Choreographer:	Rachael Rees
Assistant:	Jessica Royce
Venue:	Theatre Royal Nottingham
Date:	1 st June 2016

Grease by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey is set in 1959 and follows ten working-class teenagers as they navigate the complexities of peer pressure, politics, personal core values, and love. It was first performed in 1971 in the original Kingston Mines nightclub in Chicago before transferring to Broadway and at the time that it closed in 1980, Grease's 3,388-performance run was the longest yet in Broadway history. It went on to become a West End hit, a successful feature film and had two Broadway revivals in 1994 and 2007. But enough of Wikipedea, tonight Carlton's production of Grease the Musical was, quite simply, a triumphant explosion of energy, fun and entertainment. The 40 plus cast and orchestra were obviously having a great time and that enjoyment was shared by a suitably appreciative audience and deserved the standing ovation it earned at the end of the evening.

'Grease' centres on the friendships and relationships between the high school pupils as they approach the end of their High School days and tonight it was evident that Amanda had spent time and effort on developing characterisation and motivation giving every actor and role a distinct identity be they a T-Bird, Pink Lady, Gidget or Letterman. This attention to detail resulted in a completely believable ensemble cast which took the production to the next level of professionalism. This acting performance level was supported and vocally driven from the pit by Chris and his exceptionally tight 10-piece band. The months of vocal coaching and Direction that Chris had spent with Principal and Chorus alike paid great dividends and the 'a Capella' opening of the evening still gives me goosebumps when I think about it – very brave – very original and well worth the 'risk'. There are

too many vocal highlights to mention but Beauty School Dropout has to be praised for keeping the right side of cliché while being flat out brilliant.

Another triumph of the night was the choreography developed by Rachael Rees. Grease is such a well known musical and the distinctive choreography from the Film must have been very tempting to emulate, but Rachael managed to avoid Plagiarism and Cliché throughout the night and especially in 'Grease Lightning'. The multi directional intermingling movement of the huge cast during 'Born to Hand Jive' was quite mesmeric and something to behold!

The cast were universally excellent. I am not going to single any one of them out for specific comment other than to say that this is one of the strongest ensemble performances I have seen in a musical. Every cast member was obviously looking out for one another, reacting effortlessly as well as acting, never dropping out of character and avoiding any hint of overacting or scene stealing – except when it was their scene to steal 😊

Often when I come to the Theatre Royal, productions tend to have very literal set design – with 'bought in' sets that take significant time to strike and can interfere with the most important elements of the night – pacing, characterisation and energy. It was great to see that this production had avoided those pitfalls and instead, the 'simple' multi-level build with key props 'flown in' or brought in quickly and efficiently by the stage crew provided exactly the right flow to the night. Sound balance throughout the night was impeccable and lighting design and execution were simply Epic.

This was a great evening's entertainment by all at Carlton Operatic, and I am already looking forward to next year's West Side Story.