

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY

Footloose, Music by Tom Snow, Lyrics by Dean Pitchford,

Additional Music by Eric Carmen, Sammy Hagar, Kenny Loggins and Jim Steinman; Stage Adaptation by Dean Pitchford and Walter Bobbie based on the original screenplay by Dean Pitchford.

Directed by Erin Spears Ledford. Choreographed by Bryan Knowlton.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“I need a hero.”

Ariel Moore, played beautifully by Stephanie Prestage in the Mac-Haydn production of “*Footloose*,” needs a man, a real man who can stand up to her father, stand up to her other boyfriend, stand up to the town in which they live and make life more liveable, more enjoyable. She needs a HERO. That heroic teenager turns out to be Ren McCormack, a stranger in town who has fallen in love with her on sight, played here by Matthew Stevenson. If they sound familiar, and you’re a Shakespearean, you can think of them as Juliet and Claudio, in the 1603 play “*Measure for Measure*.” The creators of the 1984 Kevin Bacon film (remade in 2011 with Kenny Wormald) upon which this musical is based clearly knew the play. The small town of Bomont stands in here for Shakespeare’s Vienna, but there is still a ban on dancing and a cruel demagogue, the town minister named Shaw Moore, who won’t allow teenagers much joy in their lives. This modern-day Angelo, the Duke’s deputy who evokes the prohibitive law against pleasures is a highly moral, bitter man who denies his daughter and his wife all pleasure in retaliation for losing his son. Rev. Shaw Moore is played with great style by George Dvorsky in this presentation of the musical. By the way, you don’t need to know the Shakespeare play. You just need to sit back and take in this stylish show which is exhausting to watch.



Jake Koch, Matthew Harper Stevenson; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Jake Koch plays Ren’s only friend, Willard Hewitt, who cannot dance which stymies his

love affair with his girl friend Rusty, played by Kassi McMillan, one of three talented young women who serve as a sort of Greek Chorus in Act One (the other two are Amber Mawande-Spytek, and Belle Babcock); in spite of how very good they are the second act doesn't give them the same opportunity to sing in close harmony and comment on the plot.



George Dvorsky, Liz Gurland; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Mrs. Vi Moore is very nicely portrayed by Elizabeth Gurland whose Act Two song "*Can You Find It in Your Heart?*" is a highlight of the show. The show's main theme is summed up in Ren's own song "*Dancing is Not a Crime*" which Stevenson sings with great conviction.

The dancing has been choreographed by Bryan Knowlton who seems to favor calisthenic variation over social dance forms. It is

exhausting to watch the large cast perform these curious transformations of gym class exercises.

The single set with large "pieces" designed by Erin Kiernan works well under the direction of Erin Spears Ledford. Andrew Gmoser's colorful lighting helps keep the show theatrical. The costumes designed by Bethany Marx give the show a timeless quality and look great. Eric Shorey's band did justice to the score but the sound engineer had trouble balancing the band and the singers. Unfortunately.

This one will never be among my favorite shows. It was mildly amusing and entertaining enough but it lacked the usual Mac-Haydn esprit.

I have never seen an opening night so completely sold-out, so it is obvious that



Kassi McMillan, Stephanie Prestage, Amber Mawande-Spytek, Belle Babcock; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

people love this show and really want to see it. That's good news for the theatre and its audiences so see it if you can, if you must or if you're curious about it. I think it's a decent show and a good idea for musical theater novices. You won't, most likely, come out at the end humming the score, but at the Mac's next show, opening in two weeks time, you probably will. After all it is the sound of music that makes a musical.

+ 07/07/2023 +

Footloose runs at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 Route 203, Chatham, NY through July 16. For tickets and information, please visit www.machaydntheatre.org or call the box office at (518) 392-9292.