

ALL SHOOK UP CAODS at the Civic Theatre
26.09.17

A juke box musical *par excellence*, featuring an actual juke box, and music from that golden era when those Seebergs and Wurlitzer were the beating heart of youth culture. The title number – which makes a great opener for Act Two – is just one of dozens of hits from the King's discography, generously applied to a frothy story set in the summer of '55.

Shakespeare contributes a few plot devices, a sonnet and a quote, but there's not much here to trouble the academics. It is enormous fun, though, put across with style and infectious enthusiasm in Sallie Warrington's bold, energetic production. A lively ensemble show, the big numbers filling the stripped-back set with jiving blue suede shoes: the love tangles nicely suggested by the Act One finale – Can't Help Falling In Love. The wedding walk-down brings all of the couples together, even the problematic pairing of roustabout Chad – Simon Bristoe, with quiff, swivelling hips and curling lip, bringing a knowing narcissism to the role – and tomboy grease monkey Natalie, who assumes boyish attire to win her man. She's played with engaging naivety – and a great singing voice – by Tamara Anderson. Amongst the other star-crossed couples are youngsters Dean and Lorraine, Dannii Carr and Charlotte Broad, geeky Dennis [Oli Budino] finding happiness at last with Cassie Estall's starchy Miss Sandra, who shares his love for the Bard. Excellent character work from David Slater as Natalie's widowed father and Robyn Gowers as the wisecracking, worldly Sylvia, who runs the local Honky-Tonk. And from Debra Sparshott as the killjoy Mayor, who finally finds a spectacular sense of fun, with Philip Spurgeon as her side-kick “not now” Earl. Clare Penfold is the Musical Director, bringing those familiar numbers to vibrant life in their dramatic context. The sound favours decibels over depth, but there are some lovely melodic moments, such as the sobbing sax for Sylvia's big sing, There's Always Me.

The first night audience were on their feet for the rousing C'mon Everybody finale; by Saturday night it'll be hard to stop them invading the stage and bopping along with Chad and this cracking All Shook Up company.

Michael Gray