

All Shook Up
Performed by CAODS
Wednesday 27th September 2017

The evening's performance of All Shook Up began with an energy and pace that was prevalent throughout the entire production by every cast and crew member. Jailhouse rock exploded onto the stage with perfect costumes, set and dance moves. With the audience on side from the very beginning, this promised to be a very enjoyable night out without the hustle and bustle of travelling to London for the West End. The talent was in the Civic.

Simon Bristoe played the leading man 'Chad', not quite Elvis, but certainly inspired by the King himself. With thrusting hips causing girls to swoon at a mere glance, Simon played the part with relish, with the vocal ability to carry off this 'Roustabout' most convincingly. He worked the audience with his sideways smoulders, comic timing, and the stage chemistry with his leading lady was a joy to watch, played by Tamara Anderson. The two were equally matched, with a real professional clarity in her voice. Tamara showed great versatility in switching moods (and genders) fleetingly.

The hapless and forlorn Dennis was played by Oli Budino, perfectly awkward in his own skin, trying a bit too hard to belong, and pining for his unrequited love, Natalie. Excellent vocals, sung in character, he hurried about the stage trying to fit in somewhere. His solo 'It Hurts Me' was truly heartfelt.

David Slater and Robin Gower played the mature love interest between lamenting and heartbroken widower Dennis and alone-but-not-lonely Sylvia. This pair brought a real sense of experience to the stage with their confident performance and use of the stage, with powerful vocals helping to lead the ensemble pieces. Sylvia's solo There's Always Me was beautiful, but sadly some of the singing was drowned out by the orchestra.

The younger couple Lorraine and Dean, played by Charlotte Broad and Dannii Carr, made a very sweet pair. It was fun to watch Dean's character slowly untie his mother's apron strings from around his neck as he fell in love with his young lady. The scene between them as he made his way up the stairs of the bus reminded us all of love's young dream. The use of lighting the set to resemble bus windows, complete with passengers and a gangway was very effective. Cassie Estall was perfectly cast as the sultry and standoffish Miss Sandra. She had a fantastic wardrobe, and convincingly had men falling at her feet as she sashayed across the stage. With excellent vocal range and great comic timing, she held the audience well, and the scene between her and 'Ed' with the Statues was hilarious.

Deborah Sparshott was another powerhouse of a singer as the killjoy Mayor Matilda, marching about the stage delivering orders and trying to spoil the fun, trailed by the silent but strong Sheriff Earl, played by Philip Spurgeon. It was worth the wait throughout the production when he finally spoke, and he did not disappoint.

The singing throughout this show, directed by the more than competent Clare Penfold, was faultless. The only comment is that sometimes the orchestra did drown some of the quieter vocals out on occasion, but the ensemble pieces and harmonies carried through the music beautifully. Dance moves were perfectly timed, accurately executed, and showed off the varied abilities of this talented cast. Costumes provided by various contributors were impressive, as were the quick changes. The set was very effective - the bridge across the stage was used to

ensure the floor was never too crowded out, and provided many useful solutions to the various sets the show demanded. A particular favourite was the abandoned fairground and the tunnel of love, complete with bumper car and fairground horse. Lighting was used to full effect - I loved the blue flood as each cast member fell instantly in love with a stage counterpart and belted out a line or two from One Night With You, and also the red and white split stage for the Devil in Disguise number.

The ensemble cast were energetic and remained focused and enthused throughout. Despite the large cast, numerous scene changes and costume changes, pace was never lost. The backstage crew did a great job keeping the changes slick, and handling an obviously very heavy motorbike with ease on and off the stage. Our welcome into the theatre was very warm, with plenty of members on hand selling programmes. The director Sallie Warrington put together a well disciplined and talented group, and has driven this group to achieve its full potential.