

Aisle Say: Footloose fills Candlelight's intimate stage with stellar performances

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Community News

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Brandywine Hundred, Del. — Director, Lighting Designer and Set Designer Chris Alberts has corralled 15 dancers (eight of whom are male, an endangered species) to create one of the most engaging, endearing and uplifting productions at The New Candlelight since the present owners took over four years ago.

Lighting design was one of the major characters of the production, and beautifully framed the virility of this stratospherically enthusiastic and talented cast.

This "Footloose" production is March Madness, dear readers, and Bobby Gouse (in Kevin Bacon's role as Ren McCormick) left it all on the floor, with rock-edged singing and electrifying dancing. I've seen all of New Candlelight's shows the past year, and this dude *can dance*.

Kaylan Wetzell, as Ren's love interest Ariel Moore elevated testosterone levels both on stage and in the audience.

Even though the plot of the original film, later made into the stage show, was dismissed as pure puffery -- merely a vehicle for the music of Kenny Loggins, Alberts extracted terrific acting from the cast.

Brian Peeke created sidekick Willard Hewitt that will stand as one of New Candlelight's enduring characters. How do you act like a geeky, fumbling but wannabe macho cowboy? Peeke commanded stage presence with each succeeding scene and made Willard very real for us, foibles and all.

Peyton Dixon (Shaw Moore) and Gerri Weagraff (Vi Moore) portrayed the rigid, agonized pastor and dutiful wife. Their voices were terrific and their acting, stellar. The audience witnessed through their eyes and subtle gestures the torment of the loss of their only son years before.

A musical by definition is escapism. But let's face it, behind closed doors most of us have "family issues" that we carry around with us and from which there is no exit. Alberts brought out this piece of humanity in the script. The message was there, but categorically, the director made sure there was a whole lot more more fun than dysfunction.

Candice Brechbiel, Jamie Soltis and Adrienne Bergeron, playing Footloose's version of the Pink Ladies of "Grease," were entrancing and amusing foils for lead character, Ariel Moore. Their trio of "Somebody's Eyes" was well crafted and their voices harmonized perfectly.

Other hit tunes from the show are "Let's Hear It For the Boys," "Almost Paradise" and the title tune "Footloose."

The Candlelight is a small stage serving intimate audiences, first satiated by a sumptuous buffet. My sister and I sat with newlywed first-timers who had recently moved to Wilmington from their homeland China. We regaled them with the 40-year history of Candlelight, and quipped, where can you go for dinner, camaraderie and professional theatre for \$55. I hope we turned them into season ticket holders.

For owners Bob and Jody Miller, Aisle Say's suggestion is to lock Chris Alberts and pyrotechnic choreographer Angela Bates Majewski in one of those dank rooms deep in the labyrinthine basement of New Candlelight and bring them up only for succeeding shows.

The show runs through May 30. For more information, visit NewCandlelighttheatre.com or call (302) 475-2313.

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