

# Footloose

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Ever hear of Bomont, the town where it's illegal to dance? Well, if you're a movie buff, you certainly have. That's the town where Kevin Bacon and his mom moved in 1984's *Footloose*, much to Kevin's dismay. The movie introduced a heap of 80s hits, including the title song, "Let's Hear It For the Boy," "Almost Paradise," "Holding Out For A Hero," "I'm Free," "Somebody's Eyes," and "The Girl Gets Around." Fourteen years later *Footloose* made it to Broadway, as a full-fledged musical this time, with most of the movie hits integrated into its story line and a bunch of new Tom Snow creations added. The resulting production ran for over 700 performances, and though it's reputed to be a favorite high school musical, I can't recall a major L.A. production.

Fortunately, Angelinos who want to see how *Footloose* the movie translated into *Footloose* the musical can catch the latter in a sensational, high-energy, dance-packed production now running at the Glendale Centre Theatre.

Like the movie, *Footloose The Musical* follows teenage Ren McCormack (Harley Jay) and his mother Ethel (Alison Robertson) from Chicago to the sticks of Bomont, where the two seek refuge after being abandoned by Ren's father. It's hard enough for the big-city boy to adjust to life in the boonies, but when he learns that dancing is against the law inside the city limits, it's the last straw, and Ren vows to do something about it.

Fortunately, Ren is not alone in his battle. As a sexy outsider, the teen hottie soon becomes the boy all the girls want to be bad with, particularly Ariel (Jayme Lake), rebellious daughter of town preacher Shaw Moore (George Champion). Abetted by new best friend Willard (Joey Elrose), a sweet but not-too-bright fellow student, and Ariel's three best girlfriend's Rusty (Janet Krupin), Urleen (Justine Valdez), and Wendy Jo (Marisa Baram), Ren vows to bring dancing back to Bomont, if it's the last thing he does. This being musical theater, it's a no-brainer how it all turns out, but getting there is all the fun.

More than any other production I've seen there, *Footloose* actually benefits from GCT's in-the-round staging. Some shows may suffer from a lack of elaborate scenery. Not *Footloose*. (It's hard to imagine Bomont being anything but drab anyway.) What makes *Footloose* and GCT's setup such a perfect fit comes not long after Ren's arrival, in the song "Somebody's Eyes." After only a short time in Bomont, city kid Ren is sticking out like a sore thumb among the less sophisticated locals, and drawing ire from just about everyone—Reverend Moore, the school principal, the town sheriff, you name it, *everyone's* eyes are watching Ren with suspicion and downright dislike. Choreographer Simone Burch stages "Somebody's Eyes" with Ren surrounded by a continuing swirl of Bomonters pointing fingers at him and shooting out daggers with their eyes. It's not just the townsfolk that have Ren surrounded, though. The audience too becomes citizens of Bomont, at church, in the streets, at town hall meetings. It's *our* eyes as well as the performers' observing the action, which makes the production all the more involving than it might be in a traditional proscenium theater.

Director Tom Robinson and Burch use every inch of GTC's "matchbook" stage, and when filled with a couple dozen dancers, the result is in-your-face excitement. This is one GCT show where the closer you sit, the more captivated you'll be. (I was in the front row.)

Bringing triple-threat star quality to the roles of Ren and Ariel are Equity guest artists Jay and Lake, and they are totally terrific, both of them. Jay, who not too long ago was starring as Mark in the Broadway production of *Rent*, and Lake, who you may recall from last year's breakout hit *It's The Housewives*, have been excused from the still-running smash *Schoolhouse Rock Live!* Too to do *Footloose*, and the cast bonding that occurred in the schoolhouse pays off here. The two have great chemistry together, besides being perfect choices for their roles. Lanky, handsome, boy-next-door Jay is the phenomenal dancer the role requires him to be, his body seemingly more flexible than would appear to be humanly possible. Power-voiced Lake has sex appeal to spare, combined with a loveliness that makes you believe that inside bad girl Ariel is a good girl longing to break free. Their duet "Almost Paradise" is a showstopper.

Recent New York to L.A. transplant Elrose is wonderfully goofy and charming as Willard. Krupin (dazzling as Anita in *West Side Story*) is an absolute delight here as high-voiced Rusty, and she gets to give Deniece Williams a run for her money singing "Let's Hear It For The Boy." Huge-voiced Valdez (Urleen) gets her best role since Zanna, Don't!, and sings and acts the heck out of it. Baram is simply adorable as shy, never-had-a-date Wendy Jo.

The adults are fewer, but no less excellent beginning with Champion's beautiful work as Reverend Moore. As he did in *Phantom*, Champion combines gorgeous vocals ("Heaven Help Me") with real acting chops. (His second-act scene with Ren had audience members wiping away tears on all four sides.) Robertson (as Ren's mom) and Noel Britton (as the Reverend's wife Vi) are likewise very good, particularly in the powerful "Learning To Be Silent" and Britton's solo "Can You Find It In Your Heart."

The youthful nature of the cast makes *Footloose* a great showcase for up-and-coming musical theater majors and recent grads, and there is talent to spare on the GTC stage. Shaun Sumaro unleashes his inner S.O.B. as Chuck, the meanest boyfriend in town, showing off his singing and dancing chops in "The Girl Gets Around." Other local kids (triple threats all of them) include Tara Cook, Jamie Dix, Clint Gilfillan, Brandon Heitkamp, Kevin Holmquist, Michael Marchak, Jonny Marlow, Markus Polendey, Bridget Pugliese, and Chrissa Villanueva. Adult roles are capably filled by Todd Andrew Ball, Jion Hikui, Christa Hamilton, Melissa Malouff, Sunshine Marie Smith, and David Michael Treviño.

Burch's choreography is as exciting as any you'll see at a CLO, and well over half the songs in *Footloose* are dance numbers. How the big cast manages to do Burch's complex footwork without kicking each other or audience members is proof positive that these kids are all full-fledged pros.

More than any other musical I've seen at GCT, *Footloose* suffers the least from its prerecorded music tracks, perhaps due to the Top-40 nature of the score. The prerecorded music sounds just right, whether backing up singers and dancers, or providing a movie-like background soundtrack to dramatic scenes.

Tim Dietlein's set design is the most complex (and best) of any of the GCT shows I've attended, scene changes executed with lickety-split precision by a cast working at high speed and in perfect sync. In mere seconds, coffee shop booths, town hall pews, and a humongous bridge are zipped onstage and off by actors turned stagehands who miraculously escape collision. Dietlein's lighting is terrific too. Costumes by Angela Wood and The Costume Shoppe are a great reminder of everything we loved (and now look back at wondering "What were we thinking?") about 1980s fashions.

I loved every minute of *Footloose*. After the show is over, I defy anyone with feet not to want to get up and dance. As the song goes, Everybody cut, everybody cut. Everybody cut, everybody cut. Everybody cut, everybody cut. *Footloose!*

Glendale Centre Theatre, 324 N. Orange St., Glendale. Through August 29. Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8:00. Saturdays and Sundays at 3:00. Reservations: 818 244-8481 [www.glendalecentretheatre.com](http://www.glendalecentretheatre.com)

—Steven Stanley  
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Photos: John Valdez