

Review of St Joseph's School's production of "High School Musical"

Those of us old enough to remember the craze surrounding "Grease" will be familiar with the boy-meets-girl fantasy where social ostracism is overcome in favour of nascent love in the often confused world of US High School. Those of a post-Grease generation in the audience would have found the formula of "High School Musical" no less appealing, thanks to St Joseph's highly energetic and thoroughly enjoyable production.

Skilled direction and strong casting kept appreciative audiences fully engaged with and sympathetic to the fortunes of pretty new girl and math(s) geek Gabriella and popular basketball hero Troy, played with great confidence and panache by Noah Newson and Zara Holtham. The two bond over a shared love of singing, and their poignant and beautifully rendered duets were among the musical highlights of the show. The call-back to audition which they earned unsurprisingly engendered resentment on the part of usual lead performers Sharpay Evans and her brother Ryan, played convincingly by Elspeth Corder and Alex Binns. Elspeth threw herself into the part of the self-confident, attention-seeking drama queen Sharpay, and was excellent as the anti-hero of the piece: "I am a star; that's my role."

The two leads' intended participation in the musical within the Musical, which threatens to jeopardise the fortunes of the basketball and academic decathlon teams, of which Troy and Gabriella are vital members, provides the pivotal moment of the piece. Fearful that the pair might choose the singing over their interests, the Jocks and the Brainiacs work together to convince Gabriella that Troy is no longer interested in trying out for the musical. But once they see how hurtful their actions are, they come clean, and Gabriella and Troy manage to find a way to accomplish everything successfully. Talent and mutual attraction triumph, so emphasising a key message of the musical – the importance of being true to oneself.

Even the dyed-in-the-wool Coach (and Troy's Dad) Bolton, well played by Jacob Coulson, and the colourfully costumed drama teacher Ms Darbus, splendidly portrayed by Ruby Watts, patch up their differences as they come to realise this truth. Yes, squabbles and rivalries occur in staff rooms too!

The acting in general was of a high standard: all threw themselves with unabashed energy and commitment into their roles, projecting their voices, maintaining their American accents and ensuring that the one-liners weren't lost to the audience. Particular further mention must be made of Maisie Saunders as Taylor, Chelsie Postma as Kelsi and the entertaining and indefatigable portrayal of Jack Scott by Harry Reed. The leads were strongly supported by the various groups - with well-choreographed dancing, exuberant singing and adroit basketball handling (except when a loose pass went AWOL off the stage!); not to mention the glamorous and rhythmical cheerleaders.

In addition to the enthusiasm, commitment and effort of a cast numbering nearly half the school population, great credit must go to the lively and hardworking band and in particular to those many staff behind the scenes, without whom there would be no show. The penultimate number "We're all in this together" aptly summed up the high standard of performance and teamwork, expertly led by Drama Directors Robert Hudson and Kirsten Coulson and Musical Director Phil Rosier. Many congratulations to the pupils and staff of St Joseph's for delivering such an accomplished and enjoyable show!

Mick Jonas