

Nomads get fancy-free

Rocking along with *Footloose - the Musical*

Newbury Nomads: Footloose - the Musical, at the Corn Exchange from Wednesday, September 19 to Saturday, September 22

Nomads continued their admirable policy this year of choosing musicals less performed by amateur societies with **Footloose - the Musical**, first performed on stage in 1998 and directed here by Jeanette Maskell.

Ren McCormack (Richard George) leaves lively Chicago with his mum Ethel (Rhiannon Bremner) to live in the small town of Bomont. Being a lad who loves to dance he is horrified to find that, following an accident in which four young people were killed five years before, Reverend Shaw Moore (impressively played by Jeremy Mann) has dictated that the townsfolk lead sober, religious lives - and that includes no dancing, a situation Ren sets out to remedy.

This does not make him popular and to make things worse he falls for Ariel (Fern Barthorpe) the daughter of the minister and girlfriend of Chuck, the local hard guy (a crisply dynamic performance from Andy Pocock).

Musical director Nic Cope and his able band of musicians coped superbly with Tom Snow's score, from the hymnlike sensitively sung *On any Sunday* to the upbeat numbers, but the old problem of a lack of pit meant occasional drowning of the dialogue.

Nomads' young principals did well, with especially enjoyable performances from Georgie Hendry (Rusty). Kate Leek (Urleen), Ellie Selby (Wendy Jo) and Parry Bates (Willard). Richard George made an engagingly athletic lead man, if lacking perhaps a touch of authority. His final poignant scene with Reverend Moore was particularly well acted. Fern Barthorpe, belting out the great *Holding Out For a Hero*, was flashy and appropriately raunchy as the girl who rebels against her minister father.

However, in spite of all the exciting rock numbers, the song of the show for me was *Can You Find it in Your Heart?*, a musical delight from Michele Gusman as Vi, pleading with her minister husband.

The chorus's frenetic and exciting dancing in the title number told of much rehearsal with choreographer Jacqui Trumpet So why did I feel that overall the performance lacked that essential buzz? But I went on the first night and things were definitely improving through the second half, though there were still times when performers wandered aimlessly about the stage.

I am an out-and-out Nomads fan. I enjoyed the evening, but **Footloose** did not quite match the very high standards they have recently been achieving.

CAROLINE FRANKLIN