

A NOTE FROM THE DRAMATURG

“Heaven helps the man who fights his fears” – Ren McCormack, Footloose

In February 1980, the junior class of the high school in Elmore City, Oklahoma made national news when they requested permission to hold a junior prom. The town had banned dancing since its founding 1898 in an attempt to decrease the amount of heavy drinking. As one advocate of the dancing ban put it,

“No good has ever come from a dance [...] If you have a dance, somebody will crash it and they’ll be looking for only two things – women and booze. When boys and girls hold each other [...] one thing leads to another”.

The request to overturn the ban was met with a 2-2 decision from the school board, only for school board president Raymond Lee to break the tie with the words “Let ‘em dance!”

Academy Award winning lyricist Dean Pritchford was heavily influenced by the staunch conservatism and rise of the New Right in the 1980s when penning the screenplay for what would become the 1984 blockbuster hit *Footloose*. The film, starring a young Kevin Bacon, Lori Singer, and Sarah Jessica Parker, received two Academy Award nominations for Best Original Song (“Footloose” and “Let’s Hear it For the Boy”).

The musical adaptation of the film opened on Broadway at the Richard Rodgers Theatre (which now houses Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*) in 1998 where it ran for 709 performances before closing on July 2nd, 2000, just a few years before the cast, crew, and student musicians of Cumberland Valley High School’s production were born. The production received mixed critical reception, but still snagged Tony Award nominations for Best Book of a Musical, Best Original Score, Best Actress in a Musical and, of course, Best Choreography.

Today, *Footloose* is a staple for regional, community, and high school theaters across the country. During a dramaturgy workshop held in December 2021, our Cumberland Valley students reflected upon what meaning a production of *Footloose* could have today in 2022. They conversed about the show’s many themes of community, friendship, grief, intimate partner violence, and faith to arrive at the thought that the show may simply be about “hope”.

And what could be a more profound message as communities across the country continue to grapple with a pandemic, economic recovery, social unrest, and divisiveness? The students maintained that the most powerful thing we can do as humans is to maintain our hope that tomorrow will be a better day. The hope that minds can change. Hearts can soften. Divides can fall.

In *Footloose*, we find the community of Bomont grappling with the grief that comes from the loss of young lives. Decisions are made in the best interest of all, but still miss the mark. The fear of the unknown controls the adults and it is the wisdom of the young people that ultimately restores balance to the community.

As Cumberland Valley returns to the stage once again with *Footloose*, may this production serve as a reminder for all the joy that comes with being able to dance in space with one another.

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