

## Coventry HS Production of “Hair” Engages and Entertains Audience

Opening Night attracted a large crowd to the CHS auditorium.



by Russell Waterman | 12/9/11

For those who were high school students in the late 1960s, the production of *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical\** by the Coventry High School Drama Department will bring back a flood of memories.

The play touches on themes that defined those turbulent times and are still relevant today: sexuality, drugs, racism, anti-war movement, education, religion, pollution, politics and questions about social and moral values.

The rousing rock musical production features 28 student actors and is significantly modified from its original version with all of the most controversial songs deleted and has no swearing or nudity.

The first-night audience-comprised of parents, family members, high school students, senior citizens and even a few elementary school students. The crowd listened and applauded to songs and choreographed routines on love, freedom, peace and understanding.

“The whole tribe is the star,” said CHS theater program director Myke Wilkinson of the two-hour, two-act production that attracted almost 500 people on its first of three nights in the high school auditorium.

The setting for the musical is an abandoned New York City construction lot in 1968. A tribe of long-haired hippies is waging battles against the establishment.

Filled with songs that would later make many top ten rock music charts. the tribal and rebellious atmosphere is buoyed with a flair by an 8-member orchestra of a piano, drums, guitars, percussion and other instruments, directed by Brad DeGraide.

“How am I going to get out of this,” muses Claude, played by Brendon Lewis, who has been drafted but questions whether or not to serve in the Vietnam War, a lightning rod for tribal protests against any authority, the government and other institutions.

Berger (Matthew Prince), another prominent activist, supports and sometimes prods Claude, as the pair get quite a workout on and off stage in physical antics and routines.

Sheila (Jodi Desrosiers) and Hud (Maggie Polk) play pivotal parts, too.

Other cast members who get a chance to shine in the solo spotlight include Jeannie (Nina Morelli), Hud (Maggie Polk), Crissy (Emily Gamage), Leata (Zoe Michalopoulos), Dionne (Jessi Migliozi) and Ronny (Chelsea Shea).

Woof (Tyler “Mauvins” Vigeant), made a magnetic connection with the audience, especially when professing his love for a famous rock star then (hint: and now).

Wilkinson delighted the audience and his students with the characters he played, too.

“There’s great energy in the play,” said David Cockerline, a 1968 high school graduate from Danielson, CT, there with his wife to see their grandson, Kyle Wallace, perform.

“We loved it,” said Lucy Creta, mother of tribal actor, Jaked Creta. “They were working on this from 3 to 9 after school the last week. It was awesome.”

“Groovy, baby,” said Jakeb, finding it hard to get out of character right after the show. “I loved the whole thing. We’ve been working on this every day since September. The whole cast is a family.”

Greg and Cheryl Barnett proudly watched Auburn, their sophomore daughter, perform. “I thought it was incredible,” said Greg. “They showed a lot of heart and soul and all their hard work paid off.”

From backstage to center stage, support came from administration, faculty, maintenance and Student Council and from local businesses in this collaborative effort by the entire community. Even the URI Theater Department pitched in.

“This is the most taxing piece I ever attempted in the 14 years I have been here,” said Wilkinson. “It was a difficult piece to do. But there has never been as much group spirit as I’ve seen in this one. It took a lot of effort.”

“It was just the feeling of it,” said Lewis. “I am overwhelmed with joy. I hope the audience left with a good message.”

“I did not know much about the history of the 1960s, but I learned a lot about it later,” said Prince. “I enjoyed it and I am proud we made it look very professional.”

“I took a course in Music Theater and was told that you couldn’t revive it and make this (musical) vital again,” said Cockerline. “But I think people in their 30s and 40s could also connect with it.”



There will be two more productions of Hair at Coventry High School on Friday, Dec. 9 and Saturday, Dec. 10, beginning at 7 p.m. Tickets for adults are \$12, and students 18 and under, \$10. Tickets will be available at the door.

*\*(Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical is a book and lyrics by James Rado and Gerome Ragni and music by Galt MacDermot.)*