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## MSU's high energy, raunchy 'Grease' shows social change for women

Bridgette Redman, For the Lansing State Journal 7:28 a.m. EDT April 19, 2016



(Photo: Photograph Courtesy Dave Wendelberger)

The "Grease" being performed at Michigan State University is raw, raunchy and filled with sexual energy.

It's still the same story from the more sanitized versions that we've grown used to since the Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta movie. Sandy and Danny fall in love over the summer, and then are surprised to find they go to the same high school. She's a goody-two-shoes and he's a bad boy. While they like each other a lot, they have to work through their barriers.

It also tells the story of their group of friends, from Frenchie who drops out of school to attend beauty school to Kenickie who has worked all summer to buy a new car, "Greased Lightning."

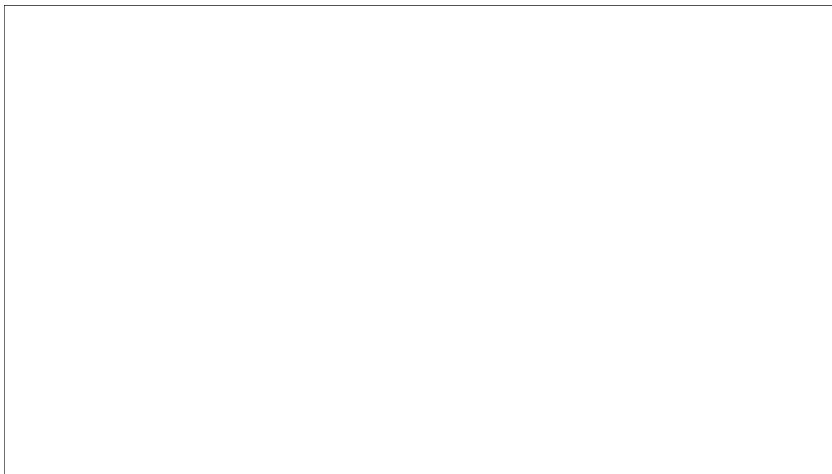
In this version, the original Broadway script, however, the school is much more blue collar and the language matches. There are f-bombs, different music, and some songs that aren't present.

It's a raunchier version that is all about a time period when things were going from the post-World War II era with its emphasis on family and clean living to the '60s and '70s with its cultural revolutions.

In many ways, this story becomes far more about Rizzo (Katelyn Wilson) than Sandy (Shelby Antel). Wilson is hard-edged and sharp. She is the polar opposite of Antel who is sweet and innocent.

Wilson fills Rizzo with an anger, an anger that society looks on her as a tramp for doing the same thing the boys get pats on the back for. She becomes the star of the show with her intense acting, singing and overt sexuality. She represents what America is becoming while Sandy is a symbol of the past.

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This "Grease" makes more sense.

The modern, sanitized one has always been problematic. It's about a girl giving in to peer pressure to get a guy. Sandy seems to shed her morals and take up drinking and smoking just because the guy won't take her unless she's sexy.

While those elements are still present in the original, it's something more. The musical becomes symbolic of the sexual revolution. Sandy transforms not just out of peer pressure, but because she is representative of a generation that is discovering itself.

Women are no longer required to be housewives, but can be professional workers who

It doesn't mean there aren't moments that now seem dated. When the girls are trying to get Sandy to smoke, they hand her a cigarette and the one girl says, "It's not going to kill you." That gave the audience an ironic chuckle.

Directed and choreographed by Brad Willcuts, the show was high energy with dance moves that were demanding. The ensemble made great use of the Pasant stage, playing to all sides of the audience in the thrust stage. He cast the show well, with each actor fitting in well to his or her part.

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Lukas Jacob played Danny who was definitely one of the bad boys, looking horribly out of place when he tried to fit in with the track team, a well-played scene helped along by costumer Elspeth Williams. He looked much more comfortable in his jeans and bare chest than in the track outfit.

He and Antel had good chemistry despite being so different and they played their scenes together well. He danced well, with impressive moves that added to his sexuality.

Bethany Heinlein stood out as Patty in no small part because she had a broken foot and played the role on crutches. She managed to still dance, move with high energy and be the bubbly cheerleader. She incorporated her crutches and used them well.

Musical director Dave Wendleberger led a pit band that added to the energy of the show. They were just the right volume, filling the house with music but not overwhelming the singers.

"Grease" is entertaining and filled with good performances. The ensemble works well together and everyone is committed to making the show a success. There are no slow moments in this production, and everyone seems to share the same vision of a show that speaks to a time period in our country's cultural history while still being relevant today.

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Grease by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey

**Who:** Michigan State University Department of Theatre

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

**Where:** Pasant Theatre, Wharton Center, MSU campus

**Tickets:** \$22 general admission, \$20 seniors and faculty, \$17 students (+\$3 Wharton Center facility fee), [www.whartoncenter.com](http://www.whartoncenter.com) or 1-800-WHARTON

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