

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Boogie Nights

Jon Conway with Shane Richie and Terry Morrison  
Theatre Royal, Nottingham - on tour  
(2003)

It was kitsch, it was crass and most of all it was cheesy. It was a time when Bailey's was a smooth club rather than a trendy liqueur, when you ate chicken in a basket rather than going to McDonald's and when cabaret was king. But although we now look back on the '70s as an eclectic melange of post-Beatles glam, disco and punk, it was an era when most people had the best years of their lives.

*Boogie Nights* recalls those heady days. Like most modern musicals, it doesn't have much of a plot. It's simply an excuse to have a great time and sing along to songs made famous by the likes of Village People, Hot Chocolate, Donna Summer, Barry White and Rod Stewart. But unlike *Mamma Mia*, for example, the storyline isn't contrived so that you can guess exactly which song is coming next.

The origins of *Boogie Nights* stretch back six years when Jon Conway was trying to find a new vehicle for Shane Richie after he'd played *Danny Zuko* in *Grease*. They wanted to put together a show based around British rather than American culture and featuring popular music rather than standards.

What they came up with was the tale of Roddy, an out-of-work dreamer who has aspirations of becoming a rock 'n' roll singer. Along the way he two-times girlfriend Debs after making her pregnant. The musical traces the relationships of the couple and their friends as they make their way through adolescence, spending some of their time in the Boogie Nights Disco.

The cast don hot pants, jump suits, miniskirts, flares and afro wigs. It encourages the audience to clap and join in with the lyrics from the first toe-tapping song to the last.

Somewhere along the way though Richie got into a lather and *EastEnders* took him from the disco floor into the Queen Vic. Stepping into his platforms is Sam Kane, an able singer and a competent dancer who is a more than capable replacement.

Other names to pull in the crowds are Sophie Lawrence, formerly Diane Butcher in *EastEnders*, who as Debs is very much the girl next door; and Jonny Regan, Big Brother 3 runner-up, who plays nightclub owner Mikey but is hardly asked to extend himself.

They are overshadowed to some extent by Matt Slack, the smooth-talking parody of a DJ who warms up the crowd before the actual show starts; Kev Orkian, a zany Terry, and Hayley Tamaddon, his dizzy girlfriend Trish, and Don Crann, Roddy's Elvis-loving, seen-it-all-before dad Eamon whose heart is bigger than he'll admit.

It's a show in which those on stage feed off the audience and vice versa. This can lead to highly comical moments, with the performers occasionally struggling to suppress their own laughter.

*Boogie Nights* doesn't profess to be anything other than a fun, energetic show to make you feel good. It doesn't take itself too seriously either - how can it when the excellent backing musicians are known as Love Machine? It succeeds because the cast stick within their limitations and concentrate on giving old-fashioned entertainment. Having a good time is compulsory.

*Boogie Nights* tours until May 10th

Sheila Connor [reviewed](#) the 2007 tour at Woking

**Reviewer:** [Steve Orme](#)